EVER ANCIENT, EVER NEW

Ruminations on the City, the Soul, and the Church

ERNEST L. FORTIN: COLLECTED ESSAYS, VOLUME 4

Edited by

MICHAEL P. FOLEY

ERNEST L. FORTIN: COLLECTED ESSAYS

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The Birth of Philosophic Christianity: Studies in Early Christian and Medieval Thought

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Volume 4

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At istas omnes disciplinas, quas se docere profitentur, ipsiusque virtutis atque sapientiae cum verbis explicaverint, tum illi, qui discipuli uocantur, utrum vera dicta sint, apud semetipsos considerant i scilicet illam veritatem pro viribus intuentes. Tunc ergo discunt.

—St. Augustine, *De magistro*

“But when the teachers have set forth with words all the disciplines that they profess to teach, the disciplines of virtue itself and of wisdom, then those who are called students consider within themselves whether these statements are true, gazing at the inner meaning—that is to say, at the truth—as much as they can. Thus in this way, they learn.”

In memoriam magistri mei, Patris Fortini, liber hic amantissime atque gratissime dicatur.

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FOREWORD

THE PROPAEDEUTIC THEOLOGY OF ERNEST L. FORTIN

To read the writings of Ernest L. Fortin is to be confronted with scholarship that is at once eloquent and estimable. Fortin can boast of being a master of many trades: a patrologist who discovered the philosophical origins to the Chalcedonian formulation of Christ's two natures; a medievalist who solved many of the riddles to the cryptic verses of Dante's *Comedy*; an ethicist who traced the genealogy of the term "social justice" in Catholic moral thought; a perceptive commentator on contemporary papal and episcopal documents; and there the list only begins. Fortin himself preferred keeping a low profile personally and professionally, a restraint that perhaps explains why, despite an impressive number of lectures and essays, his remarkable legacy has yet to be fully fathomed. Fortin's influence, however, is steadily widening, especially in the philosophical and theological circles in which he worked.[1] This is not to suggest that the nature of his influence is easily discernible—or appreciated. From his first days as an instructor in the 1950s until his death in 2002, Fortin has been alternately accused of being an archconservative Catholic and a crypto-atheist, a reactionary defendant of liberal arts education and an unseasonably early proponent of ecumenism. Fortin, it would seem, has an uncanny ability to enlighten, stimulate, and unnerve.

THE STRAUSSIAN TURN

Much of the discussion surrounding Fortin's theology concerns his relationship to Leo Strauss (1899-1973), the "Hellenic Jewish" professor of political philosophy who came to the United States as a refugee in the late 1930s and who spent most of his subsequent career at the University of Chicago.[2] No stranger to controversy himself, Strauss came to be preoccupied with the two things about which it is generally considered impolite to talk: God and politics. Most of the ruling elites of Western society have for some time echoed LaPlace's words to Napoleon when questioned about the place of the deity in his scientific theories: "I have no need of that hypothesis." As for politics, while pundit and plebeian alike retain an interest in political phenomena insofar as they are reduced to questions of personalities, power, or policy, politics in the stronger sense of the word—as the common deliberation about the highest things or as a total way of life indispensable for human happiness—is rarely given any serious thought today.

Strauss spoke of God and politics by resurrecting two debates that were all but forgotten in the twentieth century. The first of these concerns the relationship between what Tertullian referred to as "Athens and Jerusalem," classical philosophy on the one hand and orthodox religious belief on the other. Strauss understood clearly the profound tension between faith and reason, between the demands of biblical revelation and the prerogatives of philosophical investigation. This is not to say that he necessarily saw "Jerusalem" as inferior or absurd: on the contrary, Strauss was quite perceptive in demonstrating how the early modern philosophers (Hobbes, Descartes, Spinoza, et al.) who purportedly discredited biblical faith did not actually refute any of its claims. Yet Strauss was also not quick to concede the victory to the life of religious piety, the tenets of which are laudable to be sure, but incapable of being rationally verified. What is left, then, is an essentially irresolvable but ultimately fruitful tension between faith and reason, a tension which, in Strauss's opinion, accounts for the extraordinary dynamism of Western thought. "It seems to me," Strauss writes in one of his most lucid essays on the topic, "that this conflict is the secret of the vitality of the West."[3]

The second debate that Strauss re-engaged was what was known in the seventeenth century as the quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns. Strauss challenged the late Enlightenment portrayal of Western intellectual history as a more or less uninterrupted sequence of scientific, cultural, and moral progress beginning with Socrates and culminating in the present day by arguing that a definitive break with classical Greek philosophy occurred with Niccolò Machiavelli. Subsequent modern thought, Strauss contends, is a rejection and replacement of pre-modern philosophy and theology rather than an organic development of

either. This does not suggest, however, that all modern thought is monolithic. Strauss sees three essentially different philosophical trajectories or "waves" of modernity, the first beginning with Machiavelli, the second with Rousseau, and the third with Nietzsche. And within this triple movement there exist numerous variations, with a tumultuous conflux of ripples within each wave and a deluge of reaction against them all. "Nothing is more characteristic of modernity," Strauss asseverates, "than the immense variety and the frequency of radical change within it."[4]

Strauss's observations and hypotheses are often unsettling. If Strauss is right, the bulk of our most assuring societal anchors—the empirical and social sciences, modern liberal democracy, the separation of church and state, etc.—stand in need of reevaluation. For Strauss such an honest reassessment is necessary because the anchors themselves have started to give way: as thoughtful observers of all persuasions recognize, Western civilization is in the grips of an unprecedented crisis, one that has more to do, even in the age of so-called Islamo-fascism, with an internal malaise than any external threat. The Straussian project, if it may be called that, proceeds from a sense of urgency regarding this crisis in contemporary life and is thus careful to avoid nostalgic or scholiast enthusiasms. Strauss makes this clear in the opening lines of one of his most important books, *The City and Man:*

> It is not self-forgetting and pain-loving antiquarianism nor self-forgetting and intoxicating romanticism which induces us to turn with passionate interest, with unqualified willingness to learn, toward the political thought of classical antiquity. We are impelled to do so by the crisis of our time, the crisis of the West.[5]

Put differently, Strauss sets his inquiry within the context of the age-old question about how to live the best life in the here and now. An impartial retrieval of ancient wisdom may be instrumental in answering that question, but only if the potentially valuable insights of the past are prudently applied by the men and women of the present. "Only we living today," Strauss warns, "can possibly find a solution to the problems of today."[6]

THE FORTIN-STRAUSS CONNECTION

Ernest Fortin is clearly indebted to Strauss: as Fortin attests in the epilogue to this book (a previously unpublished autobiography), he read Strauss's works carefully as a doctoral student in the 1950s and studied under him at Chicago in 1962.[7] Interestingly enough, however, Fortin is loath to consider himself an exemplary "Straussian." As he wrote to an associate in 1984:

> As far as my own Straussianism is concerned, it is certainly debatable, as any good Straussian would know. I had and still have my quarrels with Strauss. He knew it, but not being a fanatic, he could tolerate differences of opinion, and all the more so as he had no use for slavish followers.... He was also one of the most truly humble men I ever met, as well as a man of great personal courage and integrity, as is evident not only from his writings but from his life. I have enough respect for his memory not to call myself a Straussian.... He would probably turn over in his grave if he knew that I was being passed off as his disciple.[8]

The concerns Fortin harbored about Strauss were apparently evident from the beginning. In an undated letter from the 1950s, Fortin's classmate Allan Bloom wrote to him and remarked, "I was rather interested in your sense that something was lacking in Strauss and Jaffa... I would like to hear more precisely what you mean."[9] Though we unfortunately do not have a copy of Fortin's response, the lacuna in question may have involved Strauss's stance regarding Jerusalem in general and Christianity in particular. Strauss, while professing an admiration of biblical faith, was most likely not a believer himself, nor did he spend a great deal of time elaborating the significant differences between the two great biblical religions, Judaism and Christianity. Yet even here Fortin was careful not to label Strauss anti-Christian. As he wrote to a friend in 1980:

> A big fuss is made about why Strauss did not talk...more often about Christianity.... The reasons for his relative silence about Christianity are hinted at clearly enough in *Natural Right and History*.[10] He thought it was largely discredited among the intellectuals to

> whom he was trying to appeal. This is not to say that he did not have some reservations about it on other grounds, but he always struck me as having a deep respect for it.... There are many ways in which Strauss was more sympathetic to classical Christianity than most Catholic theologians today.[11]

Whatever reservations Fortin may have had about Strauss, they appear to be dwarfed by the value he saw in Strauss's spirit of inquiry and in the kinds of questions he was raising.[12] That spirit was to bear considerable fruit when applied to the Catholic tradition by Fortin himself.[13]

FAITH AND REASON

As all four volumes of Fortin's *Collected Essays* attest,[14] one of those fruits concerns a deeper reflection on the relationship between faith and reason. Fortin's work in this area is distinctive, not so much because of its conclusions but because of its lack of them. The debate between faith and reason has always been prone to magisterial if sometimes facile pronouncements about their precise relationship, especially in the early modern period, when faith was summarily declared synonymous with superstition and inimical to enlightenment. The Christian counteroffensive that was launched in the nineteenth century and came to predominate in the twentieth stressed the compatibility between faith and reason either by defining faith in nonrational yet ostensibly complimentary terms, such as experience or feeling (as with Schleiermacher[15]), or by grandly claiming that the advances made by modern rationalism "owe everything" (to quote Chateaubriand) to the genius of Christianity.[16] This reconciliation of erstwhile foes, of organized religion and its cultured despisers, led to a spiritual resurgence of sorts, but it was not without its disadvantages, chief of them the transmogrification of apostolic faith in the image and likeness of the regnant philosophical schools (Kant, Hegel, etc.). This happened primarily in liberal Protestant circles, but even the Roman Catholic response in favor of an idealized medieval world-view made muddled concessions to a triumphant modern science, proffering a dualistic hybrid of nonteleological natural science and teleological anthropology.[17]

Fortin's approach to the matter charts a middle course between both ends of this spectrum. By emerging, in Dan Mahoney's words, as a partisan of the tension between faith and reason rather than an advocate of some old or new synthesis,[18] Fortin effectively cautions Catholic theologians to avoid the enthusiasm that looks for reconciliation where there is none as well as the cynicism that does not bother to look although it is patently there. Dwelling in that tension long enough forces one to reexamine one's assumptions on these matters, creating a healthy agitation that avoids premature conclusions and makes the mind restless until it can discern a more genuine wisdom. Fortin's nondogmatic approach, in other words, paradoxically preserves Christian dogma from erroneous construal and renders its believers more thoughtful and intellectually erotic. It is thus orthogonal to that earlier Catholic backlash which, in condemning all modernity as "modernism," tried to circle the wagons against a rapidly changing intellectual world (and thus, Fortin provocatively contends, made theology *more* susceptible to modernist strains[19]), but it is also not afraid to scrutinize the underlying premises of contemporary thought, premises of which its most vocal proponents are often unaware.[20]

NATURAL LAW AND NATURAL RIGHTS

A second fruit concerns Fortin's work on the ubiquity of "rights language" in Catholic discourse.[21] Since the late nineteenth century, the Church's moral theology has become increasingly rights-dominated, Catholics on the Left (if we insist on using political categories from the French Revolution for theological differences) promoting global human rights and Catholics on the Right defending the rights of the unborn. Given contemporary horizons, the articulation of Catholic morality in these terms is certainly understandable, but few until recently have raised the deeper question whether the rights tradition begun in the seventeenth century is ultimately compatible with the biblical view of holiness or human excellence. In doing just that, Fortin challenges Catholics on both sides of the aisle to move beyond political necessity or theoretical conflations by re-raising fundamental questions about human nature and its final ends. In this regard Fortin's work is an anticipation of the critique of rights launched by Alasdair MacIntyre and others.[22]

One surmises from Fortin's scholarship on morality not a little sympathy for natural law theory as it was developed in the patristic and medieval eras and for "its peculiar suitability to a religious and cultural tradition such as ours."[23] Still, the avowed purpose of these inquiries is not to end all deliberation on the matter by reasserting the classical world view over and against its modern replacement, but to caution against the almost irresistible impulse to have one's cake and eat it too, to yoke a nostalgic and "deep-

seated longing for a glorious Christian past with a powerful attachment to the freedoms of the modern age."[24] Moreover, Fortin does not propound a vigorous reassertion of natural law theory as the primary means by which all men and women of good will can, regardless of creed or culture, discuss justice. Fortin's hesitation stems in part from recent natural law theorists who have calcified the classical theory into a laundry list of do's and don'ts, thus rendering it homologous to a Kantian system of categorical imperatives and unwittingly emptying it of one of its former chief charms, its prudential flexibility. But he is also cognizant of the fact that the notion of natural "law" (as opposed to natural right) rests on a belief that the law's transgressors will be punished by a just God. As reasonable as this idea may sound to Christians, Jews, and Muslims, one may nevertheless argue that this plank in natural law theory is not discovered "naturally," that is to say, by unaided reason, but may require the buttress of a quintessentially divine revelation. Hence the natural law may not be as naturally accessible as we would have liked.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE POLITICAL ORDER

Fortin has also studied the Church's relationship to politics on both the practical and theoretical levels, again with the dominant note being one of caution.[25] Fortin is not simply concerned about national bishops' conferences looking like appendages to one political party or another (which is unfortunately what can happen when they promulgate a catalog of their opinions on various policies), but about the Church itself becoming the advocate of only one kind of regime or political system. The Church's newfound enthusiasm for modern liberal democracy, for example, makes abundant sense given democracy's role in defeating two atheistic totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century, to say nothing of the unattractive alternatives currently available on the globe today. Nevertheless, care must be given not to mistake a prudential endorsement for a doctrinal preference. Not only does the collapse of such a distinction compromise Christianity's essentially transpolitical character, but it effectively ends the open deliberation about the best regime and the best way to live, an openness that has given Catholic political thought its historic dynamism.[26] Fortin's writings on the pitfalls of various Christian solutions to what Spinoza called the theologico-political problem—solutions such as Byzantine caesaropapism, medieval papal theocracy, *conquistador* colonialism, and contemporary social activism—are crucial in bringing this simple fact to light. On the other hand, Fortin does not subscribe to an ecclesiastical isolationism (it being naive to think that one can neatly separate the moral and political spheres), but drawing on Augustine's *City of God,* reminds Christians of their twin duty to serve and critique their country. What again emerges from these considerations is the challenge of living out an irresolvable tension, in this case the tension of earnestly participating in civil society "in a manner consistent with the transcendent character of the Church's mission."[27]

PATRISTIC AND MEDIEVAL *RESSOURCEMENT*

Our reference to the *City of God* calls to mind Fortin's extensive work in patristic and medieval studies.[28] Fortin's research in these areas forms the foundation for his thinking on timely issues and timeless themes (such as the ones mentioned above), but it also reveals new facets to the intellectual giants of the Catholic tradition. His scholarship on St. Augustine, for example, is noteworthy for its careful dismantling of anachronistic myths surrounding the bishop of Hippo, such as the claim that he is the father of modern historical consciousness[29] or the progenitor of the West's "sexual hang-ups."[30] Fortin's writings on St. Thomas Aquinas, on the other hand, illuminate the deficiency of the maxim that Aquinas "baptized Aristotle," a characterization that is ultimately patronizing to both thinkers.[31]

But Fortin is perhaps best known for his writings on "esotericism" in the Church Fathers,[32] a word that conjures up all sorts of conflicting connotations (which is perhaps why Fortin disliked it[33]) and therefore requires some explanation. Fortin understands esotericism in its original philosophical sense, as the communication of teachings to a generally smaller number of disciples who are prepared to receive them after long and salubrious study or because of some sort of predisposition to what is being taught (if the classical tradition is to be believed, the word "esoteric" was first used by Pythagoras to designate precisely such amenable disciples). True esotericism, then, is neither the epoptic initiation of a mystery cult nor the secret knowledge guarded by the Gnostics; it is simply an acute sensitivity which takes into consideration different levels of listeners. With respect to writing, this sensitivity can manifest itself by the omission of certain unsettling truths, by only the most oblique reference to them, or—in the case of those authors who have no qualms with "noble lies"—by outright fibbing, all in order to throw the inattentive and hence unworthy reader off the track. At the risk of making a trite comparison, esoteric writing may be likened to a child-proof aspirin bottle, the contents of which may be obtained by those who are mature enough to figure out the directions, while the immature are kept from something that would only do them harm.[34]

Following Strauss, Fortin understood esotericism to be prevalent in the writings of classical philosophy

such as Plato's dialogues. But does such a method of writing exist in patristic literature? The answer again depends on what one means by esotericism.[35] Many Church Fathers practiced what they referred to as an "economy" in writing,[36] not only about sacramental mysteries or the creed, but about virtually all aspects of Christian teaching.[37] John Henry Newman refers to this phenomenon as "the Reserve," and it was, in fact, Newman rather than Strauss who alerted Fortin to the possibility of a multitiered mode of writing in the works of the Church Fathers.[38] How the Church Fathers exercised such a Reserve, however, varied considerably. St. Clement of Alexandria saw no contradiction between upholding the highest standards of veracity and employing salutary lies,[39] while Augustine is famous for condemning even the smallest lie told in defense of the greatest truth (though he does acknowledge the importance of selectively withholding the truth[40]).

The advantage of being aware of the possibility of esoteric elements in the writings of the Church Fathers is that it accounts for intratextual contradictions or omissions and otherwise unintelligible passages, such as Clement's peculiar reference to his *Stromata as engraphos agrapha*—unwritten teachings that are somehow *in* the writings.[41] Even so, the very notion of esotericism offends our Enlightenment predilection for direct access to all knowledge regardless of our qualifications to appropriate it well (ours is an age that thinks much of information, little of formation); similarly, the distinction between less and more qualified audiences strikes us as contemptuously elitist and therefore unworthy of Christian leaders. Yet the Fathers themselves, even those who refused to lie, understood a prudential reticence in speaking the whole truth as an essential component of evangelical charity. Too many truths exposed to a mind or heart unready to receive them can have a disastrous rather than an edifying effect, and therefore the careless preaching of what are in themselves wholesome mysteries can be a gross dereliction of pastoral duty. Yet neither could the Fathers neglect those to whom Augustine refers as the "little ones," the tiny chicks too weak for meat, for little ones are called to the nourishment of the Gospel every bit as much as the "big birds," the educated few (cf. *Conf*. XII.27.37-28.38). The solution was to imitate the genius of the Scriptures, to form a *poesis* that —to paraphrase Gregory the Great's description of the Bible—would be like a river in which the little lamb could wade and the giant elephant could swim, a *poesis* that could sustain both groups at the same time. In doing just that, incidentally, the Fathers could point to Christ himself as their model in pregnant restraint, who encoded His message in parables, the meaning of which was directly communicated to the Apostles only (Matt. 13:10-11; Mk. 4:10-11).

DANTE

One of the more intriguing examples of Fortin's work on esotericism is with respect to Dante. Throughout his scholarly life, Fortin kept returning to the splendid stanzas of Christendom's most celebrated poet.[42] But because Fortin's conclusions differ from those of Charles S. Singleton, the Dante scholar whose pious reading of the *Divine Comedy* as a poetic Thomism has had an enormous impact in this country, people are not quite certain what to make of Fortin or his position. Does Fortin even think that Dante is a Christian?

Though he is bold enough to raise that very question,[43] the thrust of Fortin's research points to an even deeper set of problems. Fortin's ultimate quest is not to brand Dante a heretic or an apostate but to consider the deeper motivation behind Dante's teaching and what contributions, if any, it makes to our understanding of philosophy and biblical religion. That teaching, as Fortin sees it, has at its heart the resuscitation of political philosophy as an independent source of wisdom and action. This involves not only freeing political deliberation from the hegemony of papal theocracy—which was, at least in Dante's view, wreaking great havoc on medieval politics—but understanding political philosophy as a genuine alternative to biblical revelation. Such a project is undoubtedly impious from an orthodox perspective (and Fortin has enumerated several instances in which Dante deviates in the *Comedy* from orthodox belief and the theological scholasticism he was supposedly versifying), but Fortin remains sympathetic to Dante's concerns. By weaving the bold teachings of his *Monarchia* into the subtle fabric of the *Commedia*,[44] Dante sought to provide the framework for a more vigorous Christian polity—one that could withstand the increasing threat of Islamic expansion[45]—as well as a more humane Christian faith—one less prone to what Machiavelli would later brand "pious cruelty."[46]

In making these arguments, incidentally, Fortin is not so much proposing a novel reading of the *Comedy* as he is retrieving an older line of interpretation whose disparate members include Boccaccio, Benvenuto da Imola, and the Council of Trent (which would have put the *Comedy* on the Index of Forbidden Books were it not for the patriotic loyalty of the Italian clergy[47]). It is also noteworthy that Marc LePain's recent translation of Fortin's book on Dante has received the *imprimatur* of Harold Bloom, the doyen of *belles-lettres*.[48] According to Fortin, Dante aroused such controversy not because people disagreed with him but because they were not certain whether they should agree with him or not.[49] Interestingly, the same can be

said about Fortin's own interpretation of Dante.

ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE

Like his work on esotericism, Fortin's writings on Dante have earned him a modicum of notoriety. Less well-known-and nowadays, less controversial—is his involvement in ecumenism.[50] As early as 1962, Fortin was lecturing on and participating in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, and in 1967 he co-founded the first ecumenical institute at a university in the Western hemisphere, the Ecumenical Institute of Religious Studies at Assumption College, Worcester, Massachusetts.[51]

No doubt part of Fortin's interest had something to do with his religious order, the Augustinians of the Assumption, which has produced prominent ecumenical figures like George Tavard (a friend and former colleague of Fortin's) and has earned it the prestigious James Fitzgerald Award for Ecumenism. But the deeper motive seems to have stemmed from the twin goal of Christian unity and Catholic self-discovery. According to Fortin, good ecumenical dialogue seeks a "profound" rather than a "shallow" encounter with someone from a different faith, a profundity that presupposes, among other things, a thorough appropriation of one's own religious tradition. Ecumenism "thus necessarily implies a painful tension between the desire for unity on the one hand and faithfulness to one's own heritage on the other."[52] This faithfulness, Fortin explains, is not a fidelity "to the simple preservation of one's heritage," but to "the creative impulse to which [one's heritage] owes its origins or its greatness and which hopefully continues to be operative in it."[53] True ecumenism from a Catholic perspective, then, involves (among other things) the process of discovering in what the greatness of the Catholic tradition consists, for fidelity to greatness requires an intimate knowledge of it. Though Fortin's enthusiasm for the movement, it appears, cooled over the years (his last article on the subject was published in 1977), he remained committed to this essential principle.

HAPPINESS AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Though Fortin's writings reveal a diverse array of interests, they may all be said to be driven by a single nagging question: the nature of authentic human happiness. Fortin's work on the thorny relationship between faith and reason, for example, emphasizes the differences between the two not because Fortin is agnostic or fideistic, but because he recognizes that every human being must choose between the life lived according to faith and the life lived according to unaided reason, and that this choice radically affects one's chance of happiness. Similarly, in his research on natural and human rights, Fortin underscores the problematic origin and character of modern rights theory because his ultimate concern is the kind of human being produced by a moral horizon landscaped not with virtue or human greatness, but entitlement. Third, Fortin scrutinizes the presuppositions of modern liberal democracy and capitalism not as an enemy but as an honest friend who sees their most common product, the bourgeois man, increasingly ill-equipped for practicing what Cicero refers to as the art of living blissfully.

Fortin's work in all of these areas has a contrapuntal, disconcerting quality to it, which is partially what renders it so valuable. There is much effort being spent today by Christians, even among the self-avowed defendants of orthodoxy, to effect a rapprochement with so-called modern thought. This is a welcome change from the knee-jerk reactions that arguably dominated previous decades of Christian thought, but it is not without perils of its own. The attempt to "speak to" the modern or postmodern world can often involve adopting concepts that are not simply alien to the deposit of faith but antithetical to it. When this is done hastily or uncritically, it risks distorting that deposit in the eyes of one's interlocutors, and perhaps more importantly, in the eyes of the faithful as well. In its laudable zeal to champion a new evangelization or to render the timeless message of the Gospel intelligible to its latter day neighbor, the Church runs the danger of rendering the Gospel unintelligible even to itself.[54]

Of course, underscoring and even fixating on discomforting tensions within Catholicism and the Western tradition as a whole may not at first blush sound like the best way to study, let alone achieve, any measure of happiness. Yet rejecting in good Socratic manner the tragedian's premise that "where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise," Fortin maintains that happiness is impossible without self-knowledge; and self-knowledge requires both a frank assessment of unpleasant truths as well as the overcoming of one's "enslavement to the prejudices of the historical cave to which [one] happens to belong."[55] This explains, among other things, Fortin's painstaking work in retrieving patristic and medieval thought, the goal of which is not to resuscitate a pristine bygone era, but to explore alternatives to contemporary opinions in the hopes of gaining a certain self-critical distance. ("To paraphrase a familiar saying," Fortin writes, "he knows not his time who only his time knows."[56]) And it also accounts for Fortin's commitment to the ecumenical movement in which, despite its enormous challenges and frustrations, Fortin remained active for a number

of years because he realized that any confessional stance defined solely in opposition to others is a poor conduit for self-understanding. “Our problem,” he once told an audience of Catholic and Protestant leaders,

> is not so much that we do not know one another but that we do not know ourselves.... [When we were adversaries,] we at least “knew” who we were and were spared the agony of having to understand ourselves on our own terms.[57]

That agony, painful as it may be, is the only path to wisdom and bliss, and so difficult encounters—be they with now alien modes of thought or non-Catholic brethren—are by no means lamentable.

THE POTENTIALLY PERMANENT VALUE OF ERNEST FORTIN’S THEOLOGICAL SCHOLARSHIP

As can be seen from the following considerations, the chief tool that Fortin uses for his various inquiries (and thus one of the most conspicuous features of his scholarship) is political philosophy. This method requires some explanation and even defense, for the relevance, let alone importance, of political philosophy to Catholic theology is far from obvious.[58] Certainly, “political philosophy”—taking the term at its most basic to mean the philosophical exploration of political phenomena—is a useful resource for Catholic ethics, moral theology, and social thought, this despite the fact that many moral theologians rarely advert to it. For instance, virtue ethics and communitarian theory, which in themselves mark a significant advance over the legalism, utilitarianism, and neo-Kantianism of previous chapters in ethics annals, stand even more ground to gain by confronting political philosophy; for the one thing these recent developments lack is an adequate assessment of humanity’s political nature. “Community” or “culture” or “state” is not the same as “city” or *civitas* or *polis,* and until the differences between these various concepts are fully understood, there remains little chance of grasping not only pre-modern Catholic political thought, but the various *termini* to which we may be naturally ordered.[59]

There is also, however, reason for theologians of every kind to take political philosophy seriously. If, as Fortin has consistently argued, Christianity is indeed a uniquely transpolitical religion—one which by its very nature is not tied to any particular land, people, caste, or regime—then in order to understand Christianity, one must also have a fair idea of what it is transcending, the polis. Hence Christianity involves an unusual paradox, one that Fortin spent most of his life exploring:

> It occurred to me that the one thing Christianity had which the other great religions of the West do not is an understanding of politics. This is despite the fact that Christianity is the world’s only apolitical religion. Maybe, in fact, it is precisely because Christianity is apolitical that it has such a profound understanding of politics.[60]

This “profound understanding” can enrich Christianity’s self-knowledge both apophatically and anagogically, that is to say, it helps the Church understand what it is not as well as what it will be. What it is not is an earthly or temporal kingdom or an entity yoked to one; what it will be (and what in several decisive respects it already is), is the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem, the sanctification of every tribe and tongue and nation and people, and all of the other things that are so poetically and vividly depicted in the Book of Revelation of the consummated kingdom of God. Given the transpolitical nature of the eschatological, Catholic theology cannot afford to ignore political philosophy.[61]

Political philosophy, then, is more than just a useful aid; it is a vital starting point for all philosophical and theological inquiry. To borrow a Peripatetic distinction, political philosophy is first philosophy *quoad nos*, that is, the philosophy, first in relation to us, that plays a crucial role in ascending to first philosophy *quoad se,* the study of the highest things in themselves.[62] And just as political philosophy establishes the conditions and context in which philosophizing can properly take place, so too does it moor theological speculation and prevent the latter from drifting away into arid or myopic cogitation and self-ignorance. Political philosophy does this chiefly by not starting “outside the cave,” by taking the opinions and concerns of the city seriously in such a way that it cannot take its own enterprise for granted or “merely assume the validity of the philosophic life”—rather, it must constantly raise the question whether philosophy is even worthwhile.[63] This forces political philosophy ever to examine itself before the tribunal of the city and thus lends to all its activities an unassuming, nondogmatic quality.[64] Political philosophy is therefore not so much the philosophical study of politics *per se* as it is the political introduction to philosophy.[65] We can see

this in the novel life of Socrates who, as Cicero famously remarked, was the first to bring philosophy down from the heavens—not to the "earth," as it is commonly mistranslated, but to the city *(in urbibus),* even into people's homes *(in domus*).[66] We can also see this in the titles of Plato's dialogues, which are named either after flesh-and-blood people or political topics (such as the laws or the republic) but never after nonpolitical realities (there is no Platonic dialogue entitled, "On Forms"). And we see it in the dialogues themselves, the most rarified metaphysical and epistemological discussions of which almost always take place within the context of a pressing political problem. Unlike the earlier pre-Socratics (to say nothing of the Cynics and Epicureans), philosophers like Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle, and Cicero never abstracted from the mundane penumbra which gives the quest for wisdom its driving poignancy and its bearings. And if this is true for classical philosophy, it is all the more true for a religion championing the incarnation of a heavenly king.

Unfortunately, however, political philosophy has not fared well in recent centuries. One of the first casualties in the Machiavellian revolution was the deliberation about the best way of life in light of the highest principles, in other words, political philosophy. What emerged in the wake of Machiavelli's twin attack on Plato and the Bible was an oddly dogmatic philosophy which no longer felt the need to justify itself before the city (even though it no longer strove for transpolitical wisdom either) and yet which was now fixated on re-engineering civic and social life. This new mode and order has thus given rise to a class of intellectuals whose "eagerness to become involved in [politics], to say nothing of an often irrepressible desire to manipulate it, is at times matched only by an artificially induced and deadening incapacity to understand it."[67] The slow demise of political philosophy initiated by Machiavelli has in our time culminated in Heidegger's politicization of philosophy, a move that destroys political philosophy because it inverts the relationship of the philosopher to the city. Rather than philosophize on the political, Heidegger completed the politicization of the philosophical, reducing all philosophical activity to the service of the state.[68] Since political philosophy involves a nonpolitical assessment of the political, the removal of this detached objectivity dismantles its *sine qua non.* The slogan, the "personal is the political," is the ultimate instantiation of this Heideggerian inversion and the diametric opposite of political philosophy.

To be sure, a host of disciplines have filled the vacuum left by political philosophy's exile from the Western mind, but whether the progeny of Freud and Weber, the psychological and social sciences (including political science), are a suitable substitute for the more architectonic approach of political philosophy remains an open question. The tensions inherent in Weber's fact/value distinction, not to mention the application of an empirical method to phenomena which are decidedly not empirical, at least raises the possibility that what commonly passes off as good science is often bad philosophy. In any case, the materialist and historicist premises of many social sciences, which go largely unquestioned by social scientists themselves, could very well disqualify them from the job of theological handmaid (assuming they were applying for it in the first place).

With this in mind, Fortin's work becomes all the more important. Fortin's theology is not comprehensive, nor is it designed to be. It has one humble but important goal: to help establish or reestablish the conditions for a serious theology that can account for itself and its transcendent relation to political life. Fortin does this by reintroducing political philosophy as the essential first and in some sense perennial companion of theological investigation, a companion that, in directing our attention to the *primum quoad nos* of political life, serves as the hinge to the *primum quoad se,* the knowledge of God and ourselves. Douglas Kries, in an analysis of Fortin's thought, refers to this as "architectonic anthropology," an all-embracing and unified recovery of human life—its "complete panoply" of possibilities, perfections, and problems.[69] It is in this sense that we may characterize Fortin's theology as propaedeutic, as a formative and preparatory introduction not just to the moral and political subdivisions of theological studies but to all areas of theological inquiry for the simple reason that it begins with *self*-inquiry, the earnest and humbling reflection on the nature of the theological quest in light of our all too human condition. This reflection, disclosing as it does the "full range of human possibilities" and thus revealing "human beings to themselves as no other science is capable of doing," enables theology "to thresh out all of the fundamental problems of human life."[70] A return to this reflection is no small feat, and thus Fortin's championing of it (he has been credited with single-handedly reintroducing political philosophy into Christian theology[71]) is a contribution of potentially permanent value.

CONCLUSION

Fortin's reliance on political philosophy brings us back again to Leo Strauss and an inevitable comparison between the two. Fortin was right to describe Strauss as a man who had little use for slavish followers, as the different directions in which Strauss's students have developed his thought testifies.[72] Interestingly, though, relatively few so-called Straussians have done much with Strauss's preoccupation with the tension

between Athens and Jerusalem. Ultimately, it has not been Allan Bloom or Harry Jaffa (to name two of Strauss's better known protégés) but the Catholic priest Fortin who has developed this theme further, thus deftly exploiting the tension that made Strauss's teaching so powerful and persuasive in the first place. It is almost as if by practicing his Catholicism that Fortin has made a first-rate Straussian, and by practicing his Straussianism that he has made a first-rate Catholic thinker. If future theologians can live the same jarring paradox with equal probity, Catholic thought in the new millennium stands much to gain.

Michael P. Foley
March 7, 2007
Traditional Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas

NOTES

1 For other treatments of Fortin's work and influence, see Daniel Mahoney, *Classical Christianity and the Political Order,* vol. 2 of *Ernest L. Fortin: Collected Essays* (henceforth CE 1, 2, or 3), ed. J. Brian Benestad (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), vii-x; Marc Guerra, "Living the Theologico-Political Problem: On Ernest Fortin's Writings," *Political Science Reviewer* 28 (1999), 219-71; Brian Benestad, "Introduction to the Work of Ernest Fortin," *Communio* 26 (Spring 1999), 40-54; Francis Canavan, S.J., "Ernest Fortin: Collected Essays," *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy,* 25:2 (Winter 1997), 257-363; Walter J. Nicgorski, "Ernest Fortin's Teaching for Catholics"; Douglas Kries, "What Does Ernest Have to Say to Political Philosophers?"; Vincent Phillip Muñoz, "Rethinking the Foundations of Religious Freedom." The latter three, which were panel presentations at the 2002 conference of the American Political Science Association, may be accessed online at the Claremont Institute website (http://www.claremont.org/publications/).

2 Before emigrating Strauss had drunk deep of the different intellectual currents of his native Germany, studying at Hermann Cohen's neo-Kantian school at the University of Marburg while learning from Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. He also maintained lifelong ties with Jacob Klein, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Eric Voegelin, and Alexandre Kojève.

3 "The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy," *Faith and Political Philosophy,* eds. P. Emberley and B. Cooper (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 221.

4 "The Three Waves of Modernity," *Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays,* ed. H. Gildin (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 83.

5 *The City and Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1964), 1.

6 "Political Philosophy and the Crisis of Our Time," *The Post-Behavioral Era: Perspectives on Political Science, eds.* G.J. Graham and G.W. Carey (New York: David McKay, 1972), 229.

7 Q.v. infra, 324, 325. Cf. "An Interview with Ernest L. Fortin," in *Gladly to Learn and Gladly to Teach: Essays on Religion and Political Philosophy in Honor of Ernest L. Fortin, A.A.,* eds. Douglas Kries and Michael P. Foley (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2002), 290ff.

8 Letter to Max Stackhouse, from the archives of Ernest Fortin, Assumption College D'Alzon Library, Worcester, MA.

9 From the archives of Ernest Fortin, currently in the Emmanuel d'Alzon Library of Assumption College, Worcester, Massachusetts.

10 Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953.

11 Undated (and unpublished) letter to Frederick Crosson, Professor in the Program of Liberal Studies at the University of Notre Dame, from the archives of Ernest Fortin.

12 For Fortin's thoughts on the usefulness of Strauss for Catholic theology, see "Rational Theologians and Irrational Philosophers: A Straussian Perspective," *CE* 2: 287-95; infra, 182.

13 Cf. Nicgorski, op. cit., who, it seems to me, implies that Fortin's use of Strauss is analogous to Aquinas'

use of Aristotle.

14 See supra, front matter.

15 Cf. infra, 177, 193.

16 *The Genius of Christianity* (Baltimore, MD: J. Murphy Co., n.d.), introduction. Cf. Ernest Fortin, Foreword, *CE* 1: xvii; *CE* 2: 291-92; and CE 3: 51.

17 Cf. *CE* 2: 293, 294. According to Fortin, Jacques Maritain's Neo-Thomism is a good example of this syncretism (cf. infra, 177, 179, 202).

18 *CE* 2: viii.

19 Cf. esp. infra, 267-72.

20 Cf. Ernest Fortin, "The *Viri novi* of Arnobius and the Conflict Between Faith and Reason in the Early Christian Centuries," *CE* 1: 169-98, "Gladly to Learn and Gladly to Teach: Why Christians Invented the University," *CE* 1: 223-34, and "Faith and Reason in Contemporary Perspective: Apropos of a Recent Book, *CE* 2: 297-316.

21 Cf. Ernest Fortin, "On the Presumed Medieval Origin of Individual Rights," *CE* 2: 243-64, "The New Rights Theory and the Natural Law," CE 2: 265-87, "Human Rights and the Common Good," *CE* 3: 19-28, and "Sacred and Inviolable: *Rerum Novarum* and Natural Rights," *CE 3:* 191-222.

22 Fortin, however, avoids the pointed indictments that characterize MacIntyre's approach, and he appears to be more open to the possibility of a mind's ascent to knowledge independent of any preordained tradition.

23 Ernest Fortin, "Natural Law and Social Justice," *CE* 2: 239.

24 Ernest Fortin, "On the Presumed Medieval Origin of Individual Rights," *CE* 2: 257.

25 Cf. Ernest Fortin, "The Regime of Separatism: Theoretical Considerations on the Separation of Church and State," *CE* 3: 1-18, "From *Rerum Novarum* to *Centesimus Annus:* Continuity or Discontinuity?" *CE* 3: 223-30, "Social Activism and the Church's Mission," *CE* 3: 253-60, "Church Activism in the 1980s: Politics in the Guise of Religion?" *CE* 3: 261-76, "Catholic Social Teaching and the Economy: Criteria for a Pastoral Letter," *CE* 3: 295-302, and "The Trouble with Catholic Social Thought," *CE* 3: 303-14.

26 Cf. infra, xxi-xxii.

27 Cf. *CE* 3: 254.

28 Almost half of the collected essays in the four volumes fall into one of these two categories.

29 Cf. "Augustine's *City of God* and the Modern Historical Consciousness," *CE* 2: 117-36.

30 Cf. "Augustine and the Hermeneutics of Love," *CE* 1: 1-19; and "Augustine and the Problem of Human Goodness," *CE* 1:21-39.

31 Cf. "The Political Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas," *CE* 2: 151-75.

32 Cf. *CE* 1: xv-xvi; "Clement of Alexandria and the Esoteric Tradition," 123-36; "Christianity and Hellenism in Basil the Great's Address *ad adulescentes,"* 137-52; "Basil the Great and the Choice of Hercules," 153-68; "The Church Fathers and the Transmission of the Christian Message," infra, 13-29; and "The 'Rhetoric' of the Church Fathers," infra, 47-58.

33 Cf. infra, 53.

34 The best examples of such writing are the philosophical dialogues of Plato. As Cicero writes, the purpose of such recondite communication is threefold: to hide the author's opinion, free the reader from error, and help him reach the most probable truth *(Tusculan Disputations* V.4.11).

35 Scholars such as Guy Stroumsa, for example, use the term to designate supposedly occult or kabalistic elements in the early Christian tradition that would later be reinterpreted as mystical. Such a view is alien to Fortin's approach (cf. *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996).

36 Cf. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistula* 58.11-12; John Chrysostom, *De sacerdotio* 1.9, 2.1.

37 Such parsimony is similar, though not necessarily identical, to the early Church's "discipline of the secret" *(disciplina arcani),* the practice of withholding certain Christian doctrines or prayers from catechumens until they were sufficiently advanced or fully initiated.

38 Cf. *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (London: Longmans, 1896), 269-70 (chap. 5); 343-47 (Note F, "The Economy"). Cf. "Answer in Detail to Mr. Kingsley's Accusations," printed as Appendix 1, no. 7, of later editions of the *Apologia.* For Fortin's testimony regarding Newman's influence on him, see Foley, "An Interview with Ernest L. Fortin, A.A.," *Gladly to Learn,* 297.

39 Cf. *Stromata* VII.8.60, VII.9.53.

40 Cf. *De mendacio and Contra mendacium.* But since not uttering the truth is distinct from lying (the utterance of a falsehood), Augustine also speaks favorably of the "art and method of hiding the truth" *(occultandi ueri artem atque rationem, ep.* 1.1).

41 *Stromata* 1.1.10, VI.7.61, VI.15.131.

42 Ernest Fortin, *Dissent and Philosophy in the Middle Ages: Dante and His Precursors,* trans. Marc LePain (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2002). Cf. also, Ernest Fortin, "Dante and the Rediscovery of Political Philosophy," *CE* 1: 251-68; "Dante and the Structure of Philosophical Allegory," *CE* 1: 269-76; "Dante's Comedy as Utopia," *CE* 1: 277-98; "Dante and the Politics of Neutrality," *CE* 1: 299-306; and "Dante and Averroism," infra 103-10.

43 Cf. infra, 108.

44 Cf. infra, 108.

45 "Dante's *Comedy* as Utopia," *CE* 1: 287.

46 *CE* 1: 265.

47 Cf. G.H. Putnam, *The Censorship of the Church of Rome* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1909), vol. 2, 308.

48 *Dissent,* back cover promotion.

49 CE 1: 254.

50 Cf. "he Anguish of Unity," infra, 211-15; "The Ecumenical Venture," 217-28; "Holiness of the Church and Ministerial Holiness," 229-36; "Christian Mission and Spirituality," 237-44; and "Ecumenism—Where Do We Go from Here?" 245-50.

51 Fortin would later write that the Institute was "remarkable in that it is itself a total product of ecumenicity," founded at the request of the Worcester Area Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Worcester, ecumenical in both scope and structure, run jointly by Catholics and Protestants, and geared towards the needs of both communities (infra, 249).

52 Ibid., 90.

53 Ibid., 90-91, resp.

54 Cf. infra, 234.

55 *CE* 1:ix.

56 *CE* 1: x.

57 Infra, 220-21.

58 As Fortin writes, “The difficulty that we encounter immediately is that the expression, ‘political philosophy,’ either corresponds to no precise reality in the minds of most of our contemporaries or is associated by them with a kind of problem-solving activity in which both the problems and the solutions are dictated by mindless ideologies” (infra, 195).

59 Cf. *CE* 1: 62-77.

60 “An Interview with Ernest L. Fortin, A.A.,” *Gladly to Learn,* 300.

61 Fortin speculates that the inability to appreciate political theology is “the obverse of a gradual dimming of the eschatological conscience in modern times” *(CE* 1: 108).

62 Cf. *Metaphysics* 1026a25-35 for some of Aristotle’s thoughts on first philosophy *(quo ad se)*.

63 Cf. Timothy Bums, “Ancient and Modern Political Rationalism in the Thought of Leo Strauss,” *Gladly to Learn,* 150.

64 Cf. *CE* 1:xiv.

65 Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1959), 93.

66 *Tusculan Disputations* V.4.10-11: *Socrates autem primus philosophiam devocavit e caelo et in urbibus collocavit et in domus etiam introduxit.*

67 Ernest Fortin, “Reflections on the Proper Way to Read Augustine,” *CE* 1: 107.

68 Cf. Heidegger’s 1933 Freiburg address, “The Self-Assertion of the German University.”

69 Op. cit.

70 Ernest Fortin, Foreword, *CE* 1: xiv.

71 Timothy Bums, “Ancient and Modern Political Rationalism in the Thought of Leo Strauss,” in *Gladly to Learn,* 145. This characterization of Fortin is, significantly, redolent of Fortin’s own description of the Church Fathers successfully introducing not simply philosophy but political philosophy into Christianity (“Rational Theologians and Irrational Philosophers,” CE 2: 290).

72 For an excellent treatment of the different Straussian schools of thought, see Catherine and Michael Zuckert, *The Truth About Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy and American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 197-259.

ABOUT THIS VOLUME

This volume covers the widest possible range of Ernest Fortin's thought, from his first published articles (one of which is presented in English for the first time) to his very last. It also contains many of Fortin's previously unpublished works. These include an intellectual autobiography (the volume's epilogue) and several conference presentations, such as Fortin's most comprehensive treatment of the topic of esotericism in patristic literature. The contents of this volume were also chosen in part to highlight Fortin's contributions to Catholic theology, though to contrast these with his work in political philosophy would be to create a false dichotomy.

Unlike, however, the other three volumes of Ernest Fortin's collected essays (which were edited by Brian Benestad in cooperation with their author), this volume does not benefit directly from Fortin's supervision. Though Fr. Fortin was enthusiastic about a fourth volume and even suggested several essays to include, he died before the project could be begun in earnest. I have thus been wary of editing overzealously, even in order to make what was originally an oral presentation conform to the parameters of a book chapter. I should also mention that since I have organized the chapters according to theme rather than age (in keeping with the format of the previous volumes), their order is not intended to present a clear evolution of Fortin's thought. The opening endnotes to each chapter offer whatever contextual information I have been able to find, while other endnotes indicate those places where significant editing was deemed necessary in order to avoid redundancy within the collection. Finally, as I have already indicated in the endnotes to the Foreword, citations of the first three volumes of the *Collected Essays* have been abbreviated to *"CE"* followed by the volume number and page number.

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REVIEWS

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FACETIÆ FORTINIANÆ & EPILOGUE

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I

THE EARLY CHURCH AND THE WISDOM OF THE GREEKS

1

THE REBIRTH OF PATRISTIC STUDIES

Barely a generation ago, patristic studies were still looked upon by the layman as the preserve of a small group of dusty and earth-bound scholars engaged in a somewhat esoteric, if not downright disreputable, pursuit known as *Wissenschaft*.[1] With less fanfare perhaps than the widely publicized biblical and liturgical renewals from which they remain inseparable, patristic studies have shown new vitality in recent years and are, increasingly, appealing to a broader and less specialized audience. Despite these gains, however, the Fathers of the Church remain a long way from the popular fare they once were in Christendom. Far from being universally accepted by his coreligionists, the modern patristic scholar is more often than not summoned to justify an interest that many persons are inclined to slough off as an extravagant, shameful, or at best harmless waste of time. Why should one read the Fathers in the first place, and what relevance could they possibly have in a world that has advanced far beyond their most prophetic insights? Questions like these are not uncommon even in ecclesiastical circles, as anyone who has done work in this field knows only too well, and it is not superfluous to attempt to answer them briefly here. Few of us realize that the literary production of the ancient Christian world greatly exceeds in bulk alone that of the pagan authors whose works have come down to us. This abundance of Christian texts is due partially, no doubt, to the vogue enjoyed by the Fathers during the Middle Ages. Although less contemptuous of pagan literature than is sometimes admitted, medieval copyists naturally tended to favor the Christian writers; but this preference is already in itself an indication of the Fathers' importance and of the prominent place they occupy in the history of our Western civilization.

WHO ARE THE CHURCH FATHERS?

Oddly enough, it is when he tries to define the term "Father of the Church" that the patristic scholar runs into difficulties. There was a time when even a medieval theologian like St. Bernard was thought to qualify for the title.[2] Nevertheless, since the eighteenth century the custom has been to use the expression, in its strict sense, with reference to the writers of antiquity and to no one else. Thus a Father of the Church is first of all an author who belongs to the period immediately following that of the Apostles. If the *terminus a quo* is easily ascertained, however, the *terminus ad quem* proves somewhat more elusive. It is hardly enough to point out that the end of the patristic era coincides with that of antiquity, since there is obviously no absolute criterion that enables us to assign precise limits to antiquity itself. Scholars are well aware of the quotient of arbitrariness reflected in any attempt to divide history into readymade and neatly delineated compartments, however convenient for pedagogical reasons such a framework may be. Nowhere is this problem felt more acutely than at the moment with which we are concerned. The truth of the matter is that the curtain did not ring down on the long Indian summer of ancient culture at exactly the same time in every part of the Roman Empire. There were countries in which this culture continued to flourish long after it had been almost completely obliterated elsewhere by the great barbarian invasions of the fifth century. In the East, moreover, where no real breach of continuity occurred between the ancient and Byzantine civilizations, such a dividing line is bound to appear even more fuzzy. Whatever the case may be, the matter is scarcely one over which we need quibble, and we may assume, in accord with the commonly accepted view, that Gregory the Great († 604) or Isidore of Seville († *c.* 636) in the West and John of Damascus († 749) in the East represent the nethermost boundaries of the patristic age.

It is more important to know why the term "Fathers of the Church" is applied only to the writers of this period, and here we are on more solid ground. As the immediate heirs of the Apostles, they were the men on whom devolved the task of christianizing the ancient world. Unlike their predecessors, the sacred writers, they were no longer inspired directly by God. Reason aided by faith alone was the only tool with which they were left to explore the deposit of revelation. In this regard their position was identical to ours, but the point to note is that they were the first to find themselves in such a position. They were the great initiators, the ones who were to set the pattern for future generations, and their period was the one in

which most of the fundamental doctrines of the Creed were clarified and formulated once and for all in the definitions of the first great Ecumenical Councils. It is only natural therefore that, among the witnesses of the Faith, they should occupy a place of honor and be regarded as Fathers by those who share that faith today.

This is not to say that all the writers of this period enjoy the same prestige or that their individual testimonies are all equally important. Strictly speaking, only those authors who were also saints and whose authority has been vouched for by tradition come under the heading of Fathers. Yet it is not unusual to include in the list some men who have adopted positions later reproved by the Church but who have nevertheless made outstanding contributions to its early life and thought. The name of Origen and, in a slightly different manner, that of Tertullian or of Theodore of Mopsuestia immediately leap to mind. In all fairness we should admit that the errors committed by these men were often those of pioneers forced to venture into hitherto uncharted areas and therefore more likely to go astray than the person who peacefully follows a well-beaten path. Furthermore, what the Church has always regarded as an infallible expression of the divine truth is not the opinion of this or that Father, although such an opinion may carry much weight at times, but the unanimous consent of the Fathers in these matters.[3] The tremendous importance that it has always attached to their teachings will become clear to anyone who takes the pains to examine the definitions of the Councils or the various pronouncements of the Holy See.

But just who were these Fathers? If we run down the list in chronological order, we encounter first of all the so-called Apostolic Fathers, like Clement of Rome or Ignatius of Antioch, to mention only two of the most prominent, one primarily a man of action, the other already a mystic, both of them still very close to the origins of Christianity and both preoccupied to an eminent degree with the “one thing that is needful.” Then come the Apologists, like Justin (“the philosopher”) or the author of the admirable *Letter to Diognetus* (one of the “gems” of second-century Greek literature, according to Wilamowitz), who will stress the unity of the new religion or “third race,” as it was commonly referred to, and will define its originality by contrasting it to paganism on the one hand and Judaism on the other. When, toward the middle of the second century, Gnosticism, with its insidious brand of fatalism and pessimism, will divide humanity into two parts, saving one of them automatically and damning the other without appeal, Irenaeus will set forth the religious significance of history and proclaim the universality of the redemption brought to the world of Christ. A short time later Clement of Alexandria will strive boldly to rescue the elements of truth contained in the contemporary Hellenistic and Gnostic theories and will incorporate them into the wisdom of Christianity or the Pauline concept of *epignosis*. With unmatched genius and at the same time greater circumspection than his predecessor, Origen will emphasize the unique “mystery” of Christ against the onslaughts of Celsus, the first great pagan intellectual to have attacked Christianity and to have redefined Hellenic culture in opposition to it. Simultaneously, the more conservative Hippolytus will feel the need to counteract the daring speculations of the Alexandrine school with his own uncompromising traditionalism.

Once we have seen accomplished the historical revolution that put an end to the persecutions and led to the official recognition of the Church, we embark upon the golden age of patristic literature, the era of the great heresies of the fourth and fifth centuries and of the theologians who rallied to the defense of the orthodox faith: Athanasius, the champion of the divinity of Christ against the Arians; the Cappadocians—Gregory Nazianzen, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa—who will pursue their work and become the promoters of the monastic movement in the East. From the Trinity the controversy shifts rapidly to the problems of Christology. Against Nestorius, Cyril of Alexandria will espouse the cause of the unity of Christ and of the divine maternity of the Blessed Virgin; against Eutyches and the embattled forces of Monophysitism, Pope Leo I and the Fathers of the Council of Chalcedon will defend the integrity of the two natures in the divine Person of Christ. In the meantime, St. John Chrysostom will set about the task of applying the moral teachings of the Gospel to every phase of life. Approximately two centuries after Tertullian had adapted the Latin language to the needs of the new faith, Augustine, the most voluminous writer of the ancient world, will almost single-handedly cause the center of gravity to shift from East to West in dealing often definitively with such crucial issues as the Trinity, grace, sin, the Church and the sacraments, and evil and divine providence.

On a more practical plane, the catechetical mystagogies, or commentaries on the liturgical rites, of Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Ambrose, and again John Chrysostom will introduce the faithful to the mysteries of the sacramental life. The spiritual and mystical life, too, which the Fathers never divorced from theology, will have its outstanding exponents in Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, the Pseudo-Dionysius (one of the greatest figures of the later patristic era and by and large its most tantalizingly enigmatic one), Augustine, Gregory the Great, and Maximus. Finally, in the all-important realm of Sacred Scripture, Origen and Jerome, the most learned man of his time in the West, will place the Christian world in their debt for centuries to come

with their editions of the Hexapla and the Vulgate. Indeed, patristic literature as a whole may be viewed as a vast commentary on the Holy Writ from which it derives its homogeneity and which never ceased to constitute its real focal point.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE FATHERS

The synthesis just attempted is of course painfully incomplete and hardly does justice to any of the writers whose names have been included. Even as it stands, however, it may suffice to give the reader an inkling of the diversity and complexity of this first "classical age" of Christianity and, at the same time, its remarkable unity. What one admires above all in the works of these men is a knack for dealing globally with the issues at hand, a profound respect for the impenetrable mystery of God, an abiding concern not only for the individual but for the communal aspects of the history of salvation, and a sense of totality and immediacy coupled with a freshness of outlook that is often missed in the more sophisticated writers of a later period. If it is true that the first manifestations of a new phenomenon are more likely to give us an insight into its most distinctive features, then anyone interested in the Christian faith will find here an inexhaustible source of knowledge and inspiration. The person trained in the scholastic tradition, as many of our Catholic students are, may be dismayed at times by what on the surface appears to be a total lack of orderliness or of formal precision. But this deficiency, if it is one, is compensated for by the direct and personal manner which these works exhibit and for which readers who are not accustomed to the logic of the schoolmen often feel a greater affinity. It should be added that, whatever their originality, the men of the Middle Ages themselves were far more indebted to the Fathers than has generally been supposed. The investigations of Dom Déchanet and of Dom Jean Leclercq have done much in this respect to restore the proper perspective. Instead of opposing the two groups artificially, as patristic scholars sometimes do, it becomes necessary to stress the continuity that binds them one to the other. By referring to St. Augustine alone no less than 2,500 times in his two *Summae*, St. Thomas had already acknowledged his dependence on his predecessor. For that matter, we have just learned from a prominent Protestant theologian that there are over 3,000 quotations from the same author in the works of Calvin.

THE CAUSES OF THE PATRISTIC RENEWAL

It is hardly surprising, then, that the Fathers should traditionally have been one of the staples of our Christian heritage. Only in recent times, as a result of the progressive secularization of Western culture, have they been ousted from the position of prominence they once occupied in our midst. Viewed in this light, the newly found interest in patristic studies may be a symptom of a deeper and more significant transformation.

The historian who pauses to examine the causes of this renewal is immediately reminded of Professor Étienne Gilson's early attempts to reintroduce the Fathers into a predominantly laicized French university by studying them not as Christians or theologians but as philosophers! So successful was the trend thus initiated that we have since been treated to any number of works in a kindred vein, ranging in quality from Margaret Strachey's stillborn *Fathers without Theology*[4] to Professor H. A. Wolfson's immensely scholarly, and sometimes debatable, *Philosophy of the Church Fathers*[5] or to the very competent and always highly readable monographs and surveys of M. Gilson himself.[6]

Still, it is doubtful whether the efforts of Gilson and his followers would have met with as much success had other, more powerful forces not worked in their favor. The radical nature of modern atheism's challenge to Christianity has seemed to call for a more deliberate return to the traditional sources of the Faith. As long as, with the Nathaniel Taylors of the eighteenth century, people felt that there was not a single clergyman in this country who did not know more theology than St. Augustine,[7] there was little likelihood that the Fathers would be read with any degree of seriousness. The present-day Christian has since learned to his sorrow that he cannot afford to be so naively optimistic. Whether he likes it or not, the harsh fact brought home to him in a variety of ways in the course of recent history is that, numerically at least, Christianity has ceased to be the dominant power in our Western society. The period inaugurated by the conversion of Constantine and climaxed by the Christendom of the Middle Ages, we now realize, is merely a vast parenthesis that has since been closed, leaving Christians once again a relatively small minority in a hostile or, what could be worse, an indifferent world. In this new context, the relevance of the Church Fathers becomes immediately apparent. They, too, were confronted with the task of implanting Christianity in a pagan world. Like the builders of the new Temple of Jerusalem, they, too, were forced to work with a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other. It could very well be that, however remote they may seem in time, there is much that our own century can learn from them.[8]

The same conviction was to impress itself even more dramatically upon the minds of our contemporaries

in the years immediately following World War I. It is sometimes difficult for us to visualize the devastating impact of that catastrophe on the imaginations and sensibilities of the men of the generation of 1914. Aside from the fact that we have since witnessed even greater atrocities, experience has shown that a built-in, repressive mechanism tends constantly to crowd unpleasant memories out of our minds. Nevertheless we may recapture something of the troubled atmosphere of those years by simply comparing, for example, the first part of Spengler's *Decline of the West,* which is still permeated with the unbounded optimism of the prewar days in which it was written, to the second part, published in the aftermath of the disaster with all the overtones and undertones of a formidable *Götterdämmerung*.[9] Up to that moment no one, with the exception of a few perspicacious and, needless to say, unpopular critics,[10] had expressed serious doubts concerning the ability of Western civilization to endure or had questioned the viability of the principles on which it was founded. Suddenly the future of the West appeared fraught with uncertainty. In the eyes of prophets of doom like Spengler its fate was already sealed. Spengler's views may have been unduly pessimistic, but it had nonetheless become plain to anyone with eyes and ears that the situation was a critical one. "We, civilizations, know now that we are mortal!" The opening line of Valéry's famous essay on the crisis of our time, first published in England in 1919, sounded an alarm that was to be heard many times in the years that followed.[11]

This abrupt turn of events was to have unexpected repercussions on the study of the Church Fathers. Almost overnight, the Late Roman Empire, previously dismissed as a time of decadence and often passed over by historians, became one of the most fascinating periods in all history. Here was an outstanding example of a civilization which was headed for its downfall and which left behind enough traces to enable us to analyze the process of disintegration, in Gauss's words, "the only corpse sufficiently well preserved to lend itself to a dissection." Alerted by Guglielmo Ferrero's *Words to the Deaf*,[12] a whole generation of historians began to explore the various phases of the decadence of the Roman Empire with a passion, one is tempted to say a frenzy, seldom observed in such matters. The Christian writers, who greatly outnumber the others in this period, were naturally the first to benefit from these investigations. What is more, the evidence uncovered by scholars soon began to contradict the assumptions that had originally guided their efforts. For all its supposed decadence, the Late Roman Empire frequently showed signs of extraordinary vitality, and it was not long before the idea of any such decadence was challenged. But, whether one still shares Lot's opinion that the Roman Empire died of internal disease or prefers to say with Piganiol that it was assassinated by the barbarians, the fact remains that much has been done to bring the Christian writers into new focus. To take one familiar example, St. Augustine, mentioned only twice, and with derogation, in Gibbon's Decline and *Fall of the Roman Empire*, has emerged as one of the most representative figures of his age and perhaps one of the greatest of all times.

FACES OF RENEWAL

Whatever the causes of this patristic renewal, and it goes without saying that they are more complex than these willfully brief remarks suggest, the phenomenon itself is one that is rapidly gaining momentum, and it may be useful at this juncture to list some of its more important manifestations. Here again we are faced with the necessity of making a choice, that is to say, numerous sacrifices. The rate at which recent scholarship has progressed has made it virtually impossible for one individual to gain first-hand knowledge of all the new developments. The preface to the latest (1958) edition of Altaner's *Patrologie* reminds us that for the 1950-1957 period alone more than 4,000 items have to be taken into account.[13] Work on critical editions, interrupted by the war, has been resumed on a progressively larger scale. Among the latest projects one should at least mention the new *Corpus Christianorum*, of which fifteen volumes have been published to date,[14] and which purports to do for our own time what Migne accomplished for the nineteenth century, namely, bringing together within the compass of a single collection and in the best texts available all the works of the Latin and Greek Fathers. Other collections have attempted to serve a wider public by providing translations of patristic texts. Almost simultaneously, and at the risk of involving duplication of effort, two such series, the *Fathers of the Church*[15] and *Ancient Christian Writers*,[16] have been launched in this country and are now well under way. By far the most successful venture of this kind, however, has been the excellent *Sources chrétiennes* series, which began to appear in France during the particularly difficult years of the German occupation.[17] Although originally intended to bring within reach of the general public the spiritual and cultural riches of the early Greek Church, it has gradually extended its program so as to include Latin, Byzantine, Oriental, para-Christian, and even late medieval and Arabic texts. The translations are accompanied by the original texts, substantial introductions, and copious notes designed to help the reader through the more difficult passages. Of the current enterprises, this is the one that best illustrates perhaps the positive and spiritual orientation of postwar patristic scholarship, as opposed to the predominantly apologetic preoccupations exemplified, for instance, by the earlier Hemmer-

Lejay collection.[18] What the editors thus hope to bring out is not what Christians already know but what may have been lost or become obscured in the course of time. This outlook is revealed particularly in the selection of such texts as St. Ambrose's instructions *On the Sacraments,* St. Hilary's treatise *On the Mysteries,* or St. Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses,* which sets forth the author's views on the mystical life. At the same time, the works of St. Augustine, none of which will be included in the *Sources chrétiennes* series, are being edited in a similar manner, with the collaboration of eminent specialists, by the Institute of Augustinian Studies in Paris.[19]

New texts, such as the *Baptismal Catecheses* of St. John Chrysostom recently published by A. Wenger, are occasionally being discovered among the vast stores of manuscripts, often unidentified or badly catalogued, hidden away in the libraries of certain Near Eastern monasteries.[20] In the West, even the new manuscript catalogue of the Bibliothèque National in Paris holds pleasant surprises in store for the unhurried scholar, as the forthcoming edition of the *Letters* of Eutropius, a fifth-century writer formerly known by name only, will demonstrate. During the last twelve years, as a result of the sensational discoveries of the Qumran manuscripts and of the Nag Hammadi papyri, many of which are still awaiting publication, much new light is being shed on the intellectual and spiritual background of the early Church and of the Gnostic doctrines, previously known only through the refutations of the Christian writers. As it progresses, the work of deciphering and of interpreting these documents, which have become the objects of intensive study, is likely to occasion considerable fence-changing and perhaps may provide the answers to some of the problems that have nagged students of this period for many years.

Another hitherto neglected area, namely that of the Christian languages and especially Latin and Greek, has greatly benefited from the pioneering work accomplished at the University of Nijmegen and the Catholic University of America. A more accurate knowledge of the process by which a specifically Christian idiom was gradually created during the first centuries has enabled us to discern, beneath the attire of classical forms in which they often parade, some of the profound ideological transformations wrought by Christianity in the pagan world. The studies of Christine Mohrmann in particular have attracted wide attention and present findings of much more than just an antiquarian or archaeological interest. The modern reader may even find in them a number of criteria which could help to resolve the current deadlock over the use of the vernacular in the liturgy.[21]

Among the writers of the Late Roman Empire, the elaborate methods of investigation employed by Paul Henry and Pierre Courcelle have paved the way for a group of young scholars presently engaged in highly original and profitable research. The study of the doctrinal aspects of this period is often complicated by the fact that many of the works that seem to have exerted a great influence at the time have not survived and are known to us only through incidental or biased remarks found in contemporary writers. Courcelle's own discoveries in the field of Latin Neoplatonism as well as his brilliant and at times provocative account of Christian Neoplatonism as it flourished in Milan at the time of Augustine's conversion, although open to much adverse criticism, have already forced us to rewrite some important chapters relating to the intellectual history of that time.[22] In the same general area, H.-I. Marrou and his disciples are busy tracing the various steps by which, out of the pagan-Christian conflict, there emerged in time a full-blown and highly individualized Christian culture which the writers of the *Spätantike* transmitted to the Middle Ages.[23]

Many prominent names have been omitted in this rapid summary obviously not because they have been judged unworthy but simply because of the impossibility of choosing from among so many worthy ones. It would likewise be pointless even to begin alluding to the individual themes that have lately become fashionable. If one of them deserves to be singled out, it would have to be the theme of the "image of God," as the current spate of articles and studies on this topic in the works of Origen, Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, Augustine, and others would seem to indicate. For a generally complete and up-to-date presentation of patristic literature, the English-speaking reader now has at his disposal the three volumes of Quasten's *Patrology*.[24] He may also form some idea of the preoccupations that are foremost in the minds of patristic scholars today by referring to the reports presented at the Second International Conference on Patristic Studies, held at Oxford in 1955, or, in a more restricted area, to the communications and acts of the Augustinian conference held in Paris in 1954 on the occasion of the anniversary of the birth of St. Augustine 1600 years ago. In our own country, the newly created Patristic Academy of America, it is hoped, will give an added impetus to students of the Fathers and will promote collaboration among them.[25] Finally, to anyone who wishes to become acquainted with the patristic era as a whole, the recent and truly admirable *Atlas of the Early Christian World,* by Professors Mohrmann and Van der Meer of the University of Nijmegen, may serve as an excellent introduction.[26] A glance at this work will quickly convince him that it is not a mere grab-bag or an accumulation of maps and plates strung together in loose fashion according to the traditional formula of the older atlases, but a glittering and well-ordered

panorama of a colorful age whose treasures many of us are just now beginning to discover. Rarely, if ever, in this writer's experience has a more successful attempt been made to bring to life, in the rich diversity of their texture, the centuries that witnessed the most far-reaching revolution the world has ever seen.[27]

NOTES

1 Editor's Note: "The Rebirth of Patristic Studies" originally appeared in *Delta Epsilon Sigma Bulletin* (October 1959), 11-20.

2 See, for example, Jemima's letter to her brother, John Henry Newman (May 5, 1826): "The design you have formed of reading through the Fathers reminds me of Archbishop Usher; he was eighteen years in accomplishing the task, and he began at twenty. What is meant by 'the Fathers'? Surely not all the authors from the second century to Bernard?"

3 Cf. *Enchiridion symbolorum,* eds. Heinrich Denziger and Clemens Bannwart (Friburgi Brisg.: Herder, 1913), no. 786.

4 New York: George Braziller, 1958.

5 Editor's Note: See infra, 292-97.

6 E.g., *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine* (New York: Random House, 1960).

7 Cf. Roland H. Bainton, *Yale and the Ministry* (New York: Harper, 1957), 98.

8 In the latest installment of Julien Green's journal, *Le bel aujourd'hui (1955-1958),* (Paris: Plon, 1958), one finds this tribute to Augustine's actuality: "Augustine is the man who never disappoints. So great is his concision that he seems preserved forever from the misfortune of growing old. It is not enough to say that he seems to have written for us, in 1955: he is always in advance of the time in which he is being read" (10; my translation).

9 2 vols, New York: A.A. Knopf, 1926-1928.

10 E.g., Georges Sorel, *Les illusions du progrès* (Paris: M. Rivière et cie, 1911).

11 Paul Valéry, "La crise de l'esprit," in *Oeuvres,* Bibliothèque de la Pleiade, Vol. (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), 988-1004.

12 Cf. trans. Ben Ray Redman, New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1926.

13 Berthold Altaner, Freiburg: Herder, 1958. The reader who wishes further information on work in progress may consult Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., "The Literature of Christian Antiquity: Current Projects," *Theological Studies* 17 (1956), 67-92.

14 Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols. Editor's Note: That number is now at 219 volumes for Greek and Latin patristic texts and 213 for medieval.

15 Editor's Note: Published by the Catholic University of America Press, it numbers 110 volumes and is also available online at newadvent.org.

16 Editor's Note: Published by the Newman Press and later the Paulist Press, it numbers 60 volumes.

17 See infra, 179-80. Editor's Note: Published by Editions du Cerf in Paris, as of February 2007 they number 511 volumes (though this figure also includes some medieval works).

18 Cf. *Les pères apostoliques: texte grec, traduction française,* eds. Hippolyte Hemmer and Paul Lejay (Paris: A. Picard, 1901-1912).

19 Editor's Note: Éditions du Cerf eventually changed this policy.

20 *Huit catéchèses baptismales inédites* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1958).

21 Twenty-six of Miss Mohrmann's articles have recently been published in book form under the title,

Études sur le latin des chrétiens (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1958). See also her *Liturgical Latin: Its Origins and Character* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1957).

22 Cf. *Recherches sur les Confessions de saint Augustin* (Paris, E. de Boccard, 1950).

23 Cf. *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1958).

24 Johannes Quasten, Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1950-1960. Editor's Note: A fourth and final volume was published in 1986.

25 Editor's Note: I have not been able to find anything about this organization except that it no longer exists. The largest national patristic organization today is the North American Patristics Society, founded in 1970.

26 London: Nelson, 1958. Editor's Note: Fortin reviewed the book in *Folia* 11 (1958), 85.

27 Editor's Note: To avoid redundancy with the introduction to "The 'Rhetoric' of the Church Fathers" (infra, 47), the following concluding paragraph has been omitted: "In a note to her brother, dated August 5, 1828, Jemima, Newman's sister, included this request from their younger sister, Mary: 'Mary begs that the next time you write you will be so kind as to enlighten her on the uses of reading the Fathers.' As far as we have been able to determine, there is no record of Newman's reply. Whether or not the Fathers of the Church will regain their position as part and parcel of our Christian legacy is still difficult to predict, but the fact that Mary's question is being asked once again is itself a symptom which any person who shares the concerns of the Church for the modern world will greet with deep satisfaction."

2

THE CHURCH FATHERS AND THE TRANSMISSION OF THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE

In his usual apophthegmatic way, Oscar Wilde once described society's lost leader as the "cultured and fascinating liar" and remarked that "lying with a moral purpose, though of late it has been rather looked down upon, was extremely popular with the antique world."[1] Our age does not take lightly or surrender easily its right to know. It is quick to greet censorship in all its forms, like the social evils with which it has become associated, with a chorus of angry protests. The slightest hint that the truth or any part thereof should be withheld from the public is likely to appear as a breach of democratic faith and carry with it connotations of intellectual or political tyranny. Still, there is a sense in which, for all its provocativeness, Wilde's statement about the "glory of mendacity which illumines the pale brow of antiquity"[2] comes closer to historical fact than most people suspect. The assiduous reader of the classical authors cannot fail to have noticed the importance which these authors attached to the social implications of knowledge and the reticence with which they communicated this knowledge to others. The same concern shows up among the Fathers of the Church, many of whom seem to have carried to a high degree of refinement what St. Augustine politely calls "the art of concealing the truth."[3] Few aspects of the early Christian writings have been more often misjudged or incriminated by modern scholars. What I propose to do is to re-examine this question and show how the Church Fathers themselves justified a position which has become almost wholly unintelligible to us.

I

As "sowers of the divine word" and our first instructors in the Faith,[4] the Church Fathers were under the obligation of announcing the good news of man's salvation to all nations. The Christian mystery is a *mysterium clamoris,* a mystery destined to be proclaimed in the light of day and shouted from the house tops.[5] To this task the Apostles and their successors had been committed by Christ. The Acts of the Apostles define the apostle precisely as a "minister of the Word of God."[6] St. Paul had urged his disciples to fulfill this ministry by preaching the Word "in season and out of season."[7] Never was the Word to be held captive or transformed into an object of selfish enjoyment. The divine truth is properly owned only when it is shared with others.[8] Just as the loaves had been multiplied upon being distributed, so, the Fathers thought, the exponent of the Word of God would rejoice in wonderful abundance as he passed this Word on to his fellowmen.[9] In the carrying out of this mission, God Himself had pledged his assistance. The whole dignity and nobility of the apostolic function lay in this power to mediate contact and fellowship with the divinity.[10]

The intrinsic efficaciousness of the divine word insured its ultimate triumph; it did not, however, automatically remove all obstacles in the path of the teacher. God had promised success, but not without a struggle. Whatever else may have been in store for him, the apostle could look forward to enormous difficulties. If we wish to understand how the Church Fathers transmitted the Christian message to their contemporaries, we must stop for a moment to consider these difficulties. I shall mention here only three of the more obvious ones.

The first difficulty is linked to the sublimity of the divine teaching. Sixteen hundred years or more of Christian thought and culture have made it hard for us to visualize the cataclysm which marked the transition from paganism to Christianity during the first centuries of our era. The message of the Gospel has become part and parcel of our intellectual equipment and no longer startles us. To the ancient world it was something new and revolutionary. Anyone who has ever tried it knows how much discussion, debate, clarification and commentary is needed in order to gain acceptance for a novel or unfamiliar idea. The human mind finds intelligible the things to which it is accustomed. The newer the idea, the less palatable it is bound to appear. In the case of doctrine as dazzling, defiant and intrinsically scandalous as the Christian

mystery, the obstacles, by human standards, were all but insurmountable. Paul Claudel has attempted to convey the reaction of the natural mind to the loftiest teachings of the Gospel in his *Figures et Paraboles.* Judas is speaking and he says:

> The trouble with me is that never at any moment was I ever able to lose my faculties of control and criticism. I am that way! The people of Cariot are that way. A kind of broad common sense. When I hear someone say that you should turn the other cheek, and pay as much for one hour of work as for ten, and hate your father and mother, and let the dead bury the dead, and damn your fig tree because it doesn't bear fruit in the month of March, and nor raise your eyes on a pretty girl, and that continuous insult to common sense, nature and justice, obviously I allow for rhetoric and exaggeration, but I don't like it. It rubs me the wrong way. There is in me a thirst for logic or, if you prefer, a middle-of-the-road feeling that is ruffled. An instinct of measure. We're all that way in the town of Cariot. In three years I haven't heard an ounce of reasonable discussion.[11]

To the difficulty inherent in the Christian message must be added, secondly, what is sometimes referred to, rightly or wrongly, as the "aesthetic prejudice" which this message encountered in the minds and sensibilities of cultured pagans. To these pagans the early Christians inevitably appeared as a scrape-together of simple or intellectually unwashed minds recruited for the most part from among the lower rungs of society—"wool-workers, cobblers, laundry-workers and the most illiterate and bucolic yokels who would not dare say anything in front of their elder and more intelligent masters."[12] The thought that a handful of "theologizing fishermen"[13] with outlandish names, parading as the repositories of the highest truths and pretending to hold the answer to man's eternal quest for happiness, could teach anything of importance to men steeped in the best philosophic and literary tradition of Greece and Rome and dedicated to its most noble ideals was simply preposterous. Such a claim could only be rejected as exorbitant or just plain silly. In words that were often repeated during the long Indian summer of ancient civilization, Plato has once extolled this culture or *paideia* as man's "first and most cherished possession."[14] As time went on, this same culture had come to epitomize the values of civilization and Hellenism, to which men began to cling even more tenaciously now that these values were threatened and in danger of being permanently lost. Recent studies such as those of Franz Cumont, H.-I. Marrou and Pierre Boyancé have attempted to show that here, in fact, lay the main obstacle to the conversion of the pagan elite.[15] The real rivals of the one true God were no longer the deities of the Greco-Roman pantheon, in whom educated pagans had long ceased to believe, whatever lip worship they may have continued to pay to them. One does not ask whether a fairy tale is true or false. Into the niches of these obsolete divinities had crept another god, less perceptible to the untrained eye and all the more dangerous, pagan culture itself, raised to the level of an absolute and idolized as the supreme norm of the good life. In comparison with this culture, Christianity could only take on the appearance of a return to superstition, barbarism, vulgarity and all that the pagan soul included under such words as *apaideusia or apeirokalia,* lack of education, lack of familiarity with things beautiful. It is no doubt with good reason that St. Augustine lists this cult of the muses, this religion which takes as its object the perfection of the rational soul, as the last and most formidable of the forces vying with Christ for the allegiances of men.[16]

The third obstacle with which the Fathers had to contend, and the last which we shall mention, was that of keeping intact the deposit of the Faith. The enemy in this case was within the walls of the Church itself. Experience has shown repeatedly that the preservation of the truth is not less difficult than its discovery. In the realm of the intellect, as elsewhere, man's conquests are never definitive. The treasure of divine faith is one which we carry about in vessels of clay. Whereas truth is one, error has a kind of infinity. Any deviation from the truth constitutes an error and any number of deviations is possible. Even the best intentions and the wholehearted adherence to a given doctrine are no guarantee against possible distortions and disfigurations. Heresies, we know, are almost as old as the Church and we have the sacred writer's own words that they will always be with us.[17] St. Paul had already cautioned his disciples against the permanent danger of controlling, adulterating, huckstering or newfangling the word of God.[18] In his *De haeresibus,* St. Augustine, who was not prone to overestimate the capacities of human nature, enumerates eighty-six heresies known to him and shrewdly observes that many others had existed in the past and would exist in the future. Even these heresies, he points out, are an effect of God's mercy and are used by Him to bring about a greater good. But they remain an evil in themselves and every precaution must be taken against them. To maintain in all its purity a doctrine as lofty as that of the Gospel among men was no light task, as the history of the early Church or, for that matter, of Christianity as a whole has demonstrated

convincingly.

How then, in the face of these odds, were the Church Fathers going to carry out with some hope of success their mission as transmitters of the word of God to their fellow men? Far from precluding the use of human means, the divine imperative and the help it promised seems to prescribe it. The presence of these difficulties made it more than necessary to exercise the utmost caution in presenting publicly matters which, by their very nature, were not apt to be readily understood or accepted by all. The resistance which Christianity encountered from without and the perils which soon threatened it from within made it impossible for an author to speak his mind freely and openly at all times without prejudice to the truth or scandal to the hearer. Origen put the matter simply and bluntly when he remarked that it is always dangerous to speak about God.[19] Not only error but truth itself can be an occasion of ruin. Many of the more subtle and abstruse doctrines of theology were of no immediate use to the simple faithful and would only have served to confuse him or inject doubts into his mind. Other doctrines were not yet sufficiently tested and established to warrant their diffusion among larger segments of the Christian population. The problem of the early Christian writers, in a nutshell, was to reconcile their duty of passing on to others in all its depth and fullness the divine faith entrusted to them with the equally urgent task of protecting the simple Faith of the vast majority of their listeners and of preserving this Faith from the revilement or perversions to which it was exposed on the part of reckless, unskilled or impious minds.

They solved this problem, to the extent that it can be solved, by resorting to a peculiar device which consists essentially in keeping the whole truth from sluggish or inexperienced minds, at the same time allowing it to transpire for the more naturally gifted or intellectually advanced reader. No important writer of the patristic period ever felt that he could state his views on certain crucial religious and theological matters without some form of concealment, and most of these writers have indicated clearly at on time or another that they had no intention of doing so. The most lucid and forthright discussion of this problem of the responsibility of the teacher is to be found in the first chapter of the *Stromata* of Clement of Alexandria. For the sake of convenience, we shall use Clement's text as the basis of our analysis.

Clement begins by asking who should be allowed to write a book, and he immediately answers that if anyone is entitled to that privilege, it is obviously the man who possesses the truth. Writings are the offspring of the soul, and the thought of living on in one's children when the time to depart has come is always a pleasant one. More important still, wisdom loves men and desires nothing more than to be shared by all. In an obvious allusion to the Gospel story, Clement compares this wisdom to a seed which, once planted, germinates in the soul of the disciple and there produces life in abundance.[20]

It is also true that knowledge of the highest kind, which Clement designates habitually by the term *gnosis,* is not within everybody's reach. All men are not equally endowed by nature or equally diligent in the pursuit of truth. Only the man who is firmly grounded in the Faith is called to the wedding feast. The Savior himself predicted that the faithful servant in whom the Word bears fruit would be rewarded and that the useless servant would be cast into the darkness without.[21] To the teacher who has received the "kerygmatic science" the greatest powers have been granted by divine providence, but he has no right to expose his knowledge to self-willed individuals who confide only in their own powers of deduction and seek the weapons of science for the sole purpose of bolstering their prejudices. Before a teacher begins to teach he must be sure of the dispositions of his hearers.[22]

But how can anyone be sure of the inner dispositions of his hearers? The answer is comparatively simple if the speaker is addressing a group directly. In that case he can always test his disciples, single out the ones who are best able to follow, note their reactions, gauge their degree of comprehension, adapt himself to their immediate needs, take into account their speech, their character, their habits, their background, observe their facial expressions and the inflections of their voice, and by putting all this information together diagnose with a fair amount of accuracy their ability to learn properly.[23]

Written works pose a far more delicate problem. Books have their fate in more ways than one. Even if they are not intended for the public at large, they are liable to fall into anybody's hands. They cannot answer all the questions that are put to them and, if they do answer, it is always in the same terms. Furthermore, there is never any guarantee that these answers will be understood correctly. Books cannot defend themselves. They are always in need of their authors or some disciple who has followed in the footsteps of the master. Anyone nearsighted and irresponsible enough to set forth in writing doctrines and opinions which could prove misleading or positively harmful to the common reader if only because he is not ready for them is not a teacher but a traitor. One does not hand a sword to a child.[24] The mysteries and the mysterious preludes to these mysteries must be dealt with mysteriously.

Clement's solution is not that difficult or controversial issues should be avoided altogether but that they should be included in such a way as to be detected by some readers and escape the notice of others.[25] The most noble task of the teacher or *didaskalos* consists in hiding skillfully the seeds of knowledge from thoughtless or unjust minds, so as not to betray the ineffable word of the true philosophy, and still fulfill the promise which he holds out to the judicious and worthy student. Clement describes this method as "the art of being nonchalant while saying important things, of showing under the veil, of revealing without letting on that is doing so."[26] Just how this is accomplished will vary a great deal from one work to another and will depend in large measure on the ingenuity of the writer. Without laying down any hard and fast rules, Clement does mention a few of the procedures commonly used while others may be gleaned from the works of his contemporaries: brevity of speech, judicious choice of words and symbols, repetitions, apparent contradictions, cryptic allusions, deliberate omissions, partial or willfully distorted quotations, all of which may serve the double purpose of alerting the discerning reader and of deterring the hurried or heedless one.

The *Stromata* are themselves a perfect example of the type of writing to which this method may give rise. Clement implies as much when he describes them as "a series of notes... patched together in a motley way, as the name itself *(Stromata)* indicates, continually dropping one subject for another, suggesting one thing in the course of discussion and declaring something else."[27] In like manner, he proceeds to compare his work to a thickly wooded mountain where vegetation of every sort, growing promiscuously, by its very abundance conceals from the plunderer the fruit trees which are intended for the rightful owner.[28] If one thing is conspicuous about the book, it is its apparent disparateness. It was never the author's aim to make the task of discovering the truth an easy one, and nobody who has ever read the book will accuse him of having done so. Yet there is every reason to believe that Clement's disorder is artful and his intention steady throughout. All these notes, he tells us, work together for the recollection and declaration of the truth for those who can rationally inquire. Some students dig much and find little gold, but those who are really of golden stock, mining for what is akin to them, will find a great deal in the few hints that have been scattered for their benefit from beginning to end.[29]

The form of writing advocated by Clement is particularly obvious in the works of the Alexandrines, but it is by no means proper to them. The passages in patristic literature which deal with it are extremely numerous. To list them would be to review practically all the major works of the early Church and many of the lesser ones as well. Such a review is out of the question here. Instead we may quote St. Jerome, who says explicitly that "Origen, Methodius, Eusebius and Apollinaris, not to mention the Latin authors, Tertullian, Cyprian, Minucius, Victorinus, Lactantius and Hilary, were often compelled to say not what they thought but what was useful."[30] Even at that, Jerome's enumeration is far from complete. It would be difficult perhaps to discover a position which enjoys a more solid backing among the ecclesiastical writers of the first centuries.

II

One would normally expect to find among students of Church history, if not universal approval, at least a certain consideration for a doctrine as unanimously endorsed by the early Church as the one just described. Despite the patronage of the most eminent authorities, however, no patristic teaching is less popular today and no ground exists on which the Fathers have been more frequently indicted. If there is an area in which the historian's most elusive bugbear, his unconscious prejudices, is apt to show up, it is this one. Our modern cult of sincerity, redefined in terms of Romantic theory, and the melioristic conception of the development of human society which has colored so much of our thinking on these matters have blinded us to the fact that, throughout the greater part of recorded history, the unrestricted diffusion of knowledge was viewed by thoughtful persons with the most serious misgivings. To measure the distance traveled we need only to observe the puzzlement, skepticism, suspicion, resentment, haughtiness, distress and even indignation with which this doctrine of the Reserve, as it is sometimes called, has been alternately received by recent patristic scholars, most of whom simply dismiss it as an extravagant and screwy idea or lump it together with its various misuses on the lunatic fringes of early Christian literature.

Alarmed by the widespread hoodwinkings which he detected in the works of the Fathers, the nineteenth-century historian William E.H. Lecky charged emphatically that the entire ecclesiastical literature of the early centuries had become "tainted with a spirit of the most unblushing mendacity."[31] Charles Bigg, in his well-known book *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria,* denounces this "unfortunate" and "immoral" doctrine as "one of the most serious errors committed by the Alexandrines and a blot on their conduct." The Reserve is, at bottom, only a "necessary corollary of the new compromise between the Church and the world, a taint inherited from the Greek schools in which Truth was not a cardinal virtue."[32] Among the

scholars who mention this doctrine, and not all of them do, very few are willing to concede that there is anything even remotely Christian about it. Lebreton labels it an "adventurous conception," foreign to the teaching of the Church and downright offensive.[33] Père Arnou sees in it nothing but an "aristocratic dream."[34] More recently Professor Hanson has reiterated the view that Clement's distinction "between the Christian Gnostic's privileged access to the secret tradition and the ordinary believer's simple ration of faith is sometimes carried to almost shocking lengths." The patristic doctrine of Reserve, he adds, "sometimes brings Origen (as it frequently brought Clement) to an almost Gnostic view of the Christian faith."[35] Finding no traces anywhere of this secret, oral or acroamatic tradition to which the Fathers often allude, other critics are reluctant to take seriously the passages that refer to it and tend to look upon the whole matter as a hoax. The would-be secret teaching of the Fathers is only an April fool's purse in the path of the reader. Open it and you find nothing. Even a sympathetic historian like Père Mondésert, who is one of our best authorities on Clement of Alexandria, cannot take Clement's remarks on the Reserve or Economy at face value and declares his esoterism superficial or, at any rate, not absolute and not consistent with the fundamental principles of his apologetics and his theology. He chalks up Clement's attitude to his spirit of caste and concludes his remarks with the rather serious indictment that Clement had no sense of community.[36] It may be interesting to note that in the introduction to his more recent edition of the *Stromata,* Mondésert himself, without reversing his position, has taken a more moderate stand on this question. He recognizes that much remains to be said about Clement's esoterism, that the exact significance of this doctrine has not yet been determined with accuracy, and that it may be more profound and play a more important role in his works than is generally admitted.[37]

These are only a few of the testimonies found here and there in the works of modern historians, but they are representative, and they all point to the same thing: on the whole the patristic rule of Economy has come off rather badly at the hands of contemporary scholarship. Characteristically, none of the objections raised by these recent critics seems to have escaped the early Christian writers. If we go back to their works, we shall find that they had not only foreseen these objections but already answered them in large measure. Upon analysis, the major criticism leveled at the Reserve may be conveniently summed up under three heads.

The first point has to do with the existence or nonexistence of an oral tradition side by side with the tradition expressed in the written works. In its simplest form, the objection confronts us with a choice between two equally worrisome and vexing alternatives. If the oral tradition really exists and represents the best thinking of the Fathers on the most important theological questions, the reader, having no access to this tradition, is doomed to remain forever in the dark as to its contents.[38] If, as others have suggested, no such oral tradition exists, the Fathers lead us astray by adverting to it and what they have to say about it is just a lot of eyewash. The first alternative may be more flattering to the Fathers than the other, but neither one, it must be confessed, is particularly attractive.

What I should like to propose in answer to this dilemma is that the Fathers never stated or implied that there existed two parallel and independent traditions, one handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation and known only to an elite, and another set down in writings which are accessible to all. They simply meant that the content of the oral tradition or teaching must find its way into the written texts, but in such a manner that it will be missed by the casual reader and sniffed, as it were, by the student to whom a few indications are all that is needed to discover the truth for himself. Never do they insinuate that one should look for their most profound teaching anywhere except in their published works; and they always insist that the resourceful reader will be able to find in these works all the elements necessary to their understanding.

Implicit in this view is the recognition, unanimous among the Fathers, of the superiority of oral teaching over written teaching. Written works, in Clement's phrase, are reminders of the teaching that has been imparted orally and for which no adequate substitute exists.[39] In the absence of oral teaching, the clever writer can, at best, transpose the procedures that are proper to it on the plane of the written word and, by camouflaging his ideas or opinions, obviate within the limits of possibility the dangers to which written teaching by its nature is exposed. Such a camouflage is not a hindrance but a positive incentive to the discovery of the truth.[40] Wisdom is never an easy matter. Like the bread that sustains his bodily life, it is a prize which each man must win in the sweat of his brow, if he is going to win it at all. Against this pursuit militate man's congenial flaccidity and listlessness. Here, more than anywhere else, the subtle interplay of transparency and secrecy which attends the most noble forms of human communication becomes a necessity. By shrouding the truth in mystery and erecting barriers between himself and his reader, the writer was actually making the truth more attractive psychologically and spurring the reader on to greater efforts.

The second point takes us back to the accusations of fraud and mendacity heaped upon the Fathers by many recent and not so recent historians. Numerous patristic texts, and this is especially true of Greek Christian literature, appear to recommend what, to a modern reader, has all the earmarks of deceitfulness and dissimulation. One is inevitably led to ask whether all this verbal fencing and double-talk would not be better designated by its real name, lies and vile hypocrisy. Much of what the Fathers wrote on this subject seems to go beyond the simple requirements of prudence and foresight. Origen and some of his followers even go as far as to speak of the necessity of lying, *necessitas mentiendi.*[41] A lie even in the name of truth is still a lie and cannot be condoned. Is the Reserve, then, really immoral or can anything be said in defense of it?

The answer to this question may not be as simple as some of us would like it to be. It is true that the language used by a few of the Fathers has been abandoned in part by later theologians. It is also possible that Origen, for one, was willing to take greater liberties with human speech than is generally allowed today. He, more than any other Christian writer perhaps, is responsible for the discredit which has fallen upon the entire doctrine of the Reserve in our time. What is noteworthy, however, is that the corrective, whenever it was needed, was supplied by the Church Fathers themselves. In his two treatises on lies, St. Augustine, to whom we owe the solution that has prevailed in the Church concerning this matter, rejects lies as being intrinsically evil, but hastens to add that it is one thing to utter falsehood and another thing to conceal the truth.[42] The man who lies necessarily conceals the truth but the converse is not true. A person will often conceal the truth not by lying but by remaining silent. Christ himself established a precedent for this practice when he told his disciples, “Many things yet I have to say to you but you cannot bear them now.”[43] And Augustine goes on to explain that if Christ had not stated the reason for which he remained silent, we might perhaps ignore that we have the right to do so, or at least we would not have this noble example upon which to model our own conduct. To withhold the truth in this manner is not only permissible, it is often mandatory. There are times when a person could not divulge what he knows without committing a sin.[44] In all fairness, it should be mentioned that Origen recommended the medicinal lie only for certain specific and laudable purposes and issued harsh warnings against exaggerations and abuses.[45] As far as I know, he never hinted that language could be used for any end other than the one for which it was intended by nature. If we consider all the restrictions which he placed upon the use of this device, we may be inclined to judge him with less severity; and if we remember all the subtle distinctions that our own moral theologians introduce into this matter, we may even be tempted to conclude that his position was not as different from our own as may have seemed at first glance.

The third and last accusation concerns the alleged aristocratic bias reflected in the Economy. It is predicated on the tacit assumption that Christianity has abolished all human barriers by substituting for the pagan view of society, with its sharply defined categories, a kind of egalitarianism in which the lowliest among men by worldly standards rank with the best in the Kingdom of God. To one who shares the “mind of Christ,” any attempt to discriminate among the faithful might thus be regarded as a perverse and wholly reprehensible scheme to reintroduce into Christian society the very stratification with which it purported to do away. Such an attempt would present us with a clear instance of the impingement of pagan ideals on Christian thought during the first centuries of the Church.

Close examination reveals, however, that this third argument is no more stringent than the other two. By recommending equal treatment for all men, Christianity did not eliminate the natural differences among them; it indirectly ratified them. Grace does not destroy nature, and nature, whether we like it or not, is highly selective and undemocratic. Independently of their station in life or of their hierarchical rank, there will always be differences of age, natural endowment and formation among the members of the Christian community. Faith adapts itself to man’s natural capacities; it does not confer them. It may also make a person better but it will not make him more intelligent. Faith or no Faith, the distinction between the *maiores* or *doctiores* and the *minores* or *simpliciores* will obtain wherever men congregate. To recognize this distinction is not in any way to detract from the eminent dignity of the simple faithful. It may be that the reasoning of the Fathers is couched in language that grates harshly at times on the delicate ears of the modern reader. Referring to the obligation of the teacher which extends to the learned and the ignorant alike, Origen affirms that he must “feed both the men and the herd, for the Prophet has said: ‘Lord, you will save men and beasts.’”[46] But the fact that our own heightened social consciousness and sensitivity objects to these terms need not entail a repudiation of the doctrine itself.

Nor does this distinction, whatever the terms used to express it, imply that the divine truth in its essence is different for different people. Faith is unmistakably one, as St. Paul asserted, but its implications are susceptible of being perceived more fully by men of wit and acumen than by others. If we pause briefly to look at the doctrines which constitute the object of the Reserve, perhaps we shall cease to wonder why they

were not considered suitable for public discussion. The ones mentioned most often are the Trinity, divine foreknowledge and predestination, original sin, angels and devils, the nature of the soul and its fate after death, and the question of pre-existing merits.[47] It is significant that many of the views held by the Fathers on these problems were subsequently rejected or modified by the Church. The early Christian works do not always set forth substantial portions of neatly bottled and labeled wisdom. Many of the knottiest problems of theology had not yet been settled or had not attained the precise formulation with which they will be handed down to us. The study of these problems was not exactly the business of spinsters and dairymaids, of workday people and prattling women, or even of high school sophomores. The young man who plunges into these questions without taking the proper precautions, says Augustine, will become not studious but curious, not learned but credulous, not wise but skeptical.[48]

The Fathers of the Church were theologians and sometimes great theologians; but they were also for the most part bishops and shepherds of souls, whose first concern was the spiritual welfare of their flock. More often than not they identified themselves outwardly with this flock and allowed themselves to be guided by its needs when they wrote. One can hardly be surprised if the assertions found in a work aimed at the general public do not always tally with other pronouncements on the same subject in a more scientific treatise or, for that matter, elsewhere in the same work. It is one thing to speak as a professional theologian and another to speak as a pastorally-minded bishop. Conflicting statements by the same writer are not uncommon in patristic literature, but they are often deliberate and can be accounted for by the complexity of life itself rather than by the author's own perplexities and confusions. What the criticisms directed against the Reserve on these grounds can prove, if they prove anything at all, is not the corruption of Christian ideals by pagan thought but the creeping influence of more recent philosophies on the outlook of the present-day historian.

III

The entire doctrine of the Reserve and its applications, as we have tried to explain them, clearly presuppose on the part of the writer a high degree of literary refinement and craftsmanship. One naturally wonders, therefore, whether the Church Fathers themselves are to be credited with the invention of this method or whether they were simply the legitimate, though perhaps not always acknowledged, heirs of an older tradition. This problem of the origin of the Reserve, like that of its nature, is one which has not yet been solved to everybody's satisfaction. In the main, historians have pointed in the direction of the mystery religions, Gnosticism or contemporary Rabbinic literature as possible sources from which the method employed by the Fathers may have been derived. Much evidence can be produced to support each one of these hypotheses. There are overt references to the pagan mysteries in many passages dealing with the Reserve and numerous expressions used by the Fathers can ultimately be traced back to the same source. Aside from these terminological similarities, however, the doctrine of the Fathers has little or nothing in common with the shallow shibboleths of the mystery cults or with the mirage of initiation to which the adherents of Gnosticism succumbed. There is a vast difference between a mere conspiracy of silence around a preciously guarded and hollow secret and a sincere desire to preserve the integrity of the divine message by not allowing it to fall into unworthy hands. The Fathers were always eager to communicate their knowledge to anyone who could benefit from it. In their works the relation between form and content may be hidden at times but it is never arbitrary or wholly unintelligible to any but the initiated. Despite superficial resemblances, therefore, there is little likelihood that the economical method of the Fathers was inspired by the ancient Hermetic tradition in any of its forms. Where, then, did the idea come from?

We may begin by noting that the Fathers discovered instances of the Reserve in Sacred Scripture and appealed to them to justify their own use of this device. The text quoted most often is no doubt Matthew 7:6, where Christ tells his disciples: "Do not give to dogs what is holy or cast your pearls before swines, or they will trample them under their feet and turn and tear you." In the Second Epistle to Timothy St. Paul likewise prescribes that the Word be entrusted only to "reliable men who will be competent in turn to teach others,"[49] for, as he explains elsewhere, "the little ones in Christ need to be fed with milk and not with solid food, for which they are not ready."[50] There were also clear-cut cases in which Christ has apparently made use of the same method. To the crowds He spoke the Word in parables, "according as they were able to understand it... but privately He explained all things to his disciples."[51] With a little coaxing, many other scriptural passages could be given similar interpretation. Clement of Alexandria cites the opening verses of the Book of Proverbs to the effect that "the man of wit and discretion will comprehend proverb and parable, the words of the wise and their riddles."[52] Playing on the Hebrew word *musar,* which could mean either "disciple" or "withdrawn," Ben Sirach asserts that "wisdom, like her name, is inaccessible to the many."[53] In a brief commentary on Exodus 21:33, Gregory the Great warns against digging a ditch in the path of the student without immediately taking pains to cover it.[54] The allegorical interpretation of

Scripture enabled its practitioners to discover the same teaching in places where one least expects to find it. Origen opposes in this sense Aaron and his sons, who wrap the sanctuary and all the vessels that belong to it in badgers' skin, to the sons of Kohath who carry them but are not permitted to uncover them under penalty of death.[55] Other texts in Scripture seem to contradict the general theory: Matthew 10:26, for example, declares that "there is nothing concealed which will not be disclosed and nothing hidden which will not be made known." But even a statement as explicit as this one was not allowed to stand in anybody's way. What the Lord really meant, says Clement, is that the secrets will be revealed to those who listen to them in secret and what is hidden will be uncovered, like the truth, to those who are capable of receiving it under a veil.[56]

Independently of the part played by Scripture in the elaboration of the patristic rule of Economy, however, it is obvious that the Fathers were strongly influenced by the pagan philosophers. Without ruling out the existence of intermediary sources, one can state with little danger or error that the great source from which most of the ideas adopted by the Fathers stem in the final analysis is the *Letters* and *Dialogues* of Plato. The question of Plato's esoterism has itself given rise to a controversy which has been raging off and on for close to two centuries. The Fathers, at any rate, never doubted the existence of this esoterism. In the *City of God,* St. Augustine, who is only one among a cloud of witnesses, affirms unequivocally that "Plato liked and constantly affected the well-known method of his master Socrates, namely, that of dissimulating his knowledge and his opinions," and he adds wistfully that for this reason "it is not easy to discover clearly what Plato himself thought on various matters, any more than it is to discover what were the real opinions of Socrates."[57]

If we glance rapidly at a few representative texts from Plato's works, we shall have no trouble in recognizing many of the ideas just encountered in the Church Fathers. The *Seventh Letter* sums up the whole matter clearly and concisely in terms which, by this time, will have acquired a familiar ring: "I do not believe," says Plato, "that arguing about these points is a good thing for men, save a small elite who are capable of discovering the truth for themselves with the help of a few intimations. As for the others, we would merely fill them with unjust contempt, which is unbecoming, or with a vain and foolish self-sufficiency by the very sublimity of the teachings imparted."[58] Clement's observations on the superiority of oral teaching and the dangers of written works are hardly more than a restatement of the doctrine of the *Phaedrus.*[59] His idea that books are the intellectual progeny of the writer, that their function is to serve as reminders of a teaching dispensed orally and that they are constantly in need of being defended and interpreted by their authors harks back to the same source.[60] His allusion to the disciples of "golden stock" echoes implicitly the myth of the *Republic* which explains the natural differences among men in terms of the varying proportions of gold, silver and brass that have gone into their make-up.[61] Origen's theory of the medicinal or white lie has been lifted verbatim from Books II and III of the same work.[62] Various other Platonic concepts reappear trussed up in biblical attire. Beneath the "trustworthy friends" of the Second Epistle to Timothy lurk in Clement's mind Plato's "reasonable mends,"[63] and in the "discourses inscribed in the soul" of which *Phaedrus* speaks the same author seems to have discerned the "knowledge written on the heart and foretold by the Prophet Jeremiah."[64]

However eager the Fathers may have been to pounce upon this doctrine, they seem to have felt that it, too, like so many other ideas filched from the pagan authors, needed fumigating. One of the reasons put forward by the philosophers for concealing the truth was the possible harm which might otherwise come to the teacher.[65] The death of Socrates stood as a vivid and permanent reminder of the fate which society reserves for those who imperil its existence by questioning its dogmas. Death was one thing which could not have the same significance for a Christian and a pagan. A Christian can name many reasons for withholding the truth but fear of death is not one of them.[66] There is at least a remote possibility that when they hammer on this point the Church Fathers are taking a swipe at their pagan predecessors and making a concerted effort to give to the teaching which they had borrowed from them a specifically Christian flavor.

IV

A few moments ago I reported the opinion of a number of scholars who have taken an openly hostile attitude toward the whole doctrine of the Reserve. One name was omitted from that list and deserves to be mentioned here because, of all those who have dealt with this question in recent times, he is perhaps the one to have given the most coherent and penetrating analysis of it. That name is John Henry Newman. Newman not only appears to have understood better than anyone else the underlying principles of the Economy, he is also one of its most illustrious martyrs. The readers of his *Apologia* may remember that part of the controversy in which he became engaged with his critics and detractors revolves precisely around this issue. Our material knowledge of the Fathers has progressed enormously since Newman's day and it

might be possible to say more about the Reserve than he did; but I doubt whether anyone could say it better. That is why it is not unfitting perhaps to close this discussion with a quotation, not from the *Apologia,* which is more familiar to the general reader, but from his book on *The Arians of the Fourth Century:*

> There are instances in various ways of the economical method, that is, of accommodation to the feeling and prejudices of the hearer, in leading him to the reception of a novel or unacceptable doctrine. It professes to be founded in the actual necessity of the case; because those who are strangers to the tone of thought and principles of the speaker cannot at once be initiated into his system, and because they must begin with imperfect views; and therefore, if he is to teach them at all, he must put before them large propositions, which he has afterwards to modify, or make assertions which are but parallel or analogous to the truth, rather than coincident with it. And it cannot be denied that those who attempt to speak at all times the naked truth, or rather the commonly received expression of it, are certain, more than other men, to convey wrong impressions of their meaning to those who happen to be below them, or to differ widely from them in intelligence and cast of mind. On the other hand, the abuse of the Economy in the hands of unscrupulous reasoners is obvious. Even the honest controversialist or teacher will find it very difficult to represent without misrepresenting what it is yet his duty to present to his hearers with caution or reserve.[67]

Newman's remarks, if properly understood, shed an abundance of light on the extraordinary and often overlooked sophistication of the works of the Church Fathers. Trained for the most part in the pagan schools of antiquity, these men had mastered the art of persuasion and of self-expression, and they put this art to good use in their efforts to disseminate the truths of the Faith. By so doing, they became the engineers of the most far-reaching religious and intellectual upheaval the world has ever seen. Much of what they wrote is singularly beautiful from a purely literary point of view; but even this beauty is insignificant compared with the wisdom within. Like Plato's philosopher, albeit for other reasons, what they feared above all else was the "lie in the soul,"[68] and they avoided it all the more conscientiously since the one Being before whom they would never have wanted to blush was not just the daemon who dwelled inside of them as he had dwelled inside of Socrates, but the One whom they knew would search their hearts in eternity. Having taken rhetoric and twisted its neck, as Verlaine once said, the modern reader finds it difficult to appreciate this rhetoric in the works of the Fathers, and he has practically forgotten that it ever existed. For that reason alone it may not have been superfluous to remind him that the one thing which the wisdom of the ancients never did foolishly was to overlook the power of foolish or villainous minds. No one in the ancient world had ever taken the truth more seriously or shown greater respect for it than the Church Fathers. This could well be one of the numerous lessons which the twentieth-century Christian, who, by a curious historical coincidence, is faced with so many of the same problems, may still learn from them.

NOTES

1 O. Wilde, "The Decay of Lying," *Intentions,* Vol. 6 of *The Writings of Oscar Wilde* (London: A.R. Keller & Co., 1907), 34, 58. Editor's Note: "The Church Fathers and the Transmission of the Christian Message" is the first of two lectures delivered on February 2, 1961, for the Program for Christian Culture, St. Mary's College, South Bend, Indiana.

2 "The Decay of Lying," in *Intentions,* 17th ed. (London: Methuen, 1934), 49.

3 *Illa utiliter excogitata occultandi veri ars et ratio (Epistula* 1.1).

4 *Clement* of Alexandria, *Stromata* I.1.

5 *Matthew* 10:27; cf. Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Ephesios* XIX.1.

6 Acts 6:4.

7 11 Timothy 4:2,5.

8 Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* I.1.1.

9 Ibid.

10 Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* VII.52.

11 *Figures et Paraboles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1936).

12 Origen, *Contra Celsum* III.55.

13 Ibid. 1.62; cf. Tertullian, *De anima* III.3.

14 Plato, *Laws* I.644a; cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Pedagogue* I.16; Gregory of Nazianzus *Panegyric on St. Basil* XI.1.

15 Franz Cumont, *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des Romains* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1942); H.-I. Marrou, *Musikos Aner: Étude sur les scènes de la vie intellectuelle figurant sur les monuments funéraires romains* (Grenoble: Didier & Richard, 1938); Pierre Boyancé, *Le culte des muses chez les philosophes grecs* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1937).

16 Augustine, *De vera religione* 55.110.

17 I Cor. 11:19.

18 II Cor. 2:17.

19 Origen, *Homil. in Ezech.* I.11. Origen's words are quoted from Sextus, *Sent.* 352; cf. Henry Chadwick, *The Sentences of Sextus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 52.

20 Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* I.1.

21 Ibid., I.2-3.

22 Ibid., I.8.

23 Ibid., 1.9.

24 Ibid., I.14; cf. Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* IV.9.23: "For there are some things which with their full implications are not understood or are hardly understood, no matter how eloquently they are spoken, or how often, or how plainly. And these things should never, or only rarely on account of some necessity, be set before a popular audience."

25 *Stromata* I.13; I.15.

26 Ibid. I.15.

27 Ibid. IV.4.

28 Ibid. VI.2; VII.111; cf. IV.6.

29 Ibid. IV.4.

30 Jerome, *ep.* 48.13.

31 W.E.H. Lecky, *The History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe,* Vol. I (New York: D. Appleton, 1866), 393-94.

32 Charles Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 183, 187, 354.

33 Jules Lebreton, "Les degrés de la connaissance religieuse d'après Origène," *Recherches de science religieuse* 12 (1922), 274; "Le désaccord de la foi populaire et de la théologie savante dans l'Église chrétienne du IIIe

siècle," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 20 (1924), 5.

34 R. Amou, "Platonisme des Pères," *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique,* eds. Alfred Vacant, E Mangenot, Emile Amann, Vol. 12 (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, ca. 1951), 2367.

35 R.P.C. Hanson, *Origen's Doctrine of Tradition* (London: S.P.C.K., 1954), 56, 77.

36 Claude Mondésert, S.J. *Clément d'Alexandrie* (Paris: Aubier, 1944), 62.

37 Claude Mondésert, S.J., ed., *Les Stromates I,* Sources chrétiennes 30 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1951), 17-18.

38 Some of the older historians appealed to this oral tradition to establish the antiquity of certain doctrines such as the Trinity or the Mass, which are not widely attested in the works of the earliest Christian writers. The first author to have proposed this solution appears to be E. Schelstrate, *De Disciplina Arcani,* Rome, 1685. Schelstrate's theory won widespread acceptance, especially among Roman Catholic writers, during the 18th and 19th centuries. The doctrine of theological development has rendered this explanation largely superfluous.

39 *Stromata* I.14.

40 Ibid. V.56; cf. IV.4.

41 Origen, *Contra Celsum* IV.19, *Stromata* VI; cf. Jerome, *Adv. libros Rufini* I.18.

42 Augustine, *Contra mendacium* X.23; De *mendacio* X.17.

43 John 16:12.

44 Augustine, *Contra Academicos* III.17.38.

45 Origen, *Stromata* VI; *Comment. In Jon.* XX.2; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* VII.53.

46 Origen, *Homil. in Gen.* XIII.1, 4.

47 Origen, *Contra Celsum* VI.6, 18, 26; *Homil. in Gen.* XII.4; *Homil. in Exod.* IV.2; *Comment. in Matt.* XVII.30; *In Rom.* II.4, X.11.

48 Augustine, *De ordine* II.5.17; cf. I.11.31.

49 II Tim. 2:2.

50 I Cor. 3:1-2.

51 Mark 4:33-34; Matthew 13:11-15.

52 Provo. 1:5-6.

53 Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 6:23.

54 Gregory the Great, *Moralium libri* XVII.26.

55 Origen, *Homil. in Num.* V.1.

56 Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* I.13.

57 Augustine, *De civitate Dei* VIII.4.

58 Plato, *Ep.*7.344 b.

59 Plato, *Phaedrus* 274b-277a; cf. *Epist.* II.314 c.

60 *Phaedrus* 275d ff.

61 Plato, *Republic* III.415a; V.468e.

62 Plato, *Republic* II.382c, III.389b; cf. ibid. V. 459d.

63 Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.3 and Plato, *Republic* V.450e.

64 Plato, *Phaedrus* 278a; cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.3 and VI. 131.

65 E.g., *Numenius, On the Things Concealed by Plato,* ap. Eusebius, *Praep. Evang.* XIII.5.

66 Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* VII.53.

67 J.H. Newman, *The Arians of the Fourth Century,* 4th ed. (London: Pickering, 1876), 71-72.

68 Plato, *Republic* II.382b.

3

THE NATURE OF THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE

Pope Pius XI once remarked that "we have perhaps not given sufficient thought to the principles and methods by means of which the Church was first established throughout the world."[1] Much has been done to fill this lacuna in recent years. The renewal of biblical and patristic studies, the current interest in the liturgy and catechetics of the early Church, have all contributed greatly to our knowledge of the origins and development of Christianity during the first centuries. This knowledge is all the more interesting to us since there is a remarkable similarity between our own situation and that of the first Christians. Perhaps one of the most striking developments in our century has been the realization that we no longer live in a regime of Christendom but in a regime of diaspora. This has led to the observation that our methods of apostolate, which were suited to a regime of Christendom, are not applicable or as easily applicable in a world that has become not only dechristianized but dedivinized in the course of recent centuries. The modern Christian, who is faced with the task of reconverting the world in which he lives, has much to learn from the men who Christianized it for the first time during the early centuries of our era.

In our first lecture yesterday, we had an opportunity to study some of the methods used by the Church Fathers in transmitting the Christian message to their contemporaries. Today, I would like to take up another point that has lately been the subject of much discussion, and sometimes controversy, and that has to do with the intrinsic nature of the Christian message. I would like to introduce the problem in the following manner.

The Christian message, we know, was handed down through preaching and instruction. The Apostles and their successors were the first witnesses of the divine Word and God's appointed instruments in Its transmission to others. In carrying out this mission, they faced enormous difficulties. Pious authors sometimes present Christian revelation as a kind of fulfillment of the teachings of the philosophers and picture the pagan world as ready to fall into the arms of Christ, embracing the new religion. Yet it would be dangerous to minimize the extent of the cataclysm that marked the transition from paganism to Christianity during the first centuries. What we have here is a head-on collision between ideals, the pagan and the Christian, both of which made an absolute claim on the allegiances of men. The proof is that in the beginning, Christian vocation was a vocation to martyrdom, and not only to spiritual martyrdom (it is always a vocation to spiritual martyrdom), but to physical martyrdom. Thanks to the persistent efforts of the early Christian writers, however, the new faith succeeded in implanting itself, and in time the entire Roman world was converted to Christ.

As we reflect upon this phenomenon, we are inevitably led to ask ourselves: How could this gigantic enterprise possibly have succeeded? It is not enough to say, as some historians have done, that Christianity triumphed through Constantine. Even if that were the case, we would still have to explain how Constantine himself was won over. Generally speaking, there are two ways in which a religion may impose itself. One is by force. The most famous example in the West of a religion that succeeded in propagating itself by force, or by means of a holy war, is of course Islam. The other way is by persuasion. Because of its very nature, Christianity could only conquer the world by peaceful and spiritual means. Furthermore, due to the fact that Christianity developed in the Greco-Roman world and retained the medium of communication proper to that world, i.e. the Greek and Latin languages, it was compelled to conquer it from within. It had to win over the minds and hearts of men. This could only be done by means of persuasion or rhetoric.

We can speak in this sense of a campaign or a spiritual crusade to convert the pagan world to the ideal of the Gospel. Indeed, we have here the first example in history of a campaign, or of a strategy of spiritual warfare, designed to bring about the establishment of a new ideal, not only among the men of a given city or nation, but among all men. Greek philosophy in its most noble form—the form that it takes in Plato and Aristotle—was in its own way an attempt to implant a new ideal and to transform the ancient world from

within. Yet the philosophers of antiquity never undertook a campaign of this sort, for the simple reason that they thought its chances of success were extremely slight. According to the classical view, the actualization of the ideal, of the best way of life or of the best regime (as they called it), can only be brought about by the collaboration of philosophy and political power. The union of these two elements is literally a "coincidence," that is to say, a coming together by chance of two things that are rarely associated and that, as a matter of fact, have a natural tendency to drift away from each other. We can explain this in a very simple way by means of a comparison that Plato himself uses in the *Republic.* Plato likens the city to a ship and raises the question, "Who is going to pilot that ship?" There are two candidates for the job. The first has a profound knowledge of the art of navigation. He has spent a long time studying the heavens and he knows the exact position of each star. He is also well-acquainted with all the perils of the sea. But he is a poor speaker, and he is incapable of persuading others, who are not well-versed in these matters, that he is the best qualified for the job. The second candidate has no real knowledge of navigation and its complexities, but he is a very powerful speaker and he can persuade his listeners to accept almost anything that he proposes. Which of these two men is more likely to be chosen? In all but a very few cases, it will be the second.[2]

The same applies to society. Only in the most favorable circumstances can the man who has the best knowledge of political things hope to obtain the consent of the people and hence the power needed to carry out his mission; but there is no infallible way of controlling these circumstances. Men are here at the mercy of fortune; and fortune, as her name indicates, is a woman, a woman who will not allow herself to be caught.[3] All of this was universally accepted by the classical philosophers. Only in modern times has the attitude of philosophers in this respect undergone a radical change. The first philosopher to have suggested that a similar ideal could be imposed on large segments of the population by means of propaganda was Machiavelli. This idea of a strategy of spiritual warfare is perhaps the only element that Machiavelli, who was opposed to Christianity in every other way, borrowed from Christianity. But Machiavelli was able to arrive at this conclusion only by lowering considerably the standards set for men and by restricting the horizons of their minds. Far from restricting the horizons of men's minds, Christianity extends them infinitely. It makes greater demands on the individual than the most noble pagan ideal. Why is it, then, that Christians believed that their efforts to propagate the Christian faith would succeed, whereas even the most optimistic pagan philosopher felt that in practice his efforts were doomed to failure? Or to state the problem in the words of St. Augustine, isn't it "incredible that Jesus Christ should have risen in the flesh and ascended with flesh into heaven?" Isn't it "incredible that the world should have believed so incredible a thing?" Isn't it "incredible that a very few men of mean birth and the lowest rank and no education have been able so effectually to persuade the world, and even its learned men, of so incredible a thing?"[4]

The answer that is most commonly given to this question, e.g. by Origen and St. Augustine, is that the pagan world was persuaded of the truth of the new faith by miracles and prophecies. Miracles, Augustine explains, were particularly abundant at the time of Christ and in the early days of the Church, and they accounted for the conversion of the first Christians. As time went on, the number of miracles diminished, but at the same time the fulfillment of prophecies became more apparent and served as an inducement for others to embrace the new faith. One immediately senses, however, that this is not for Augustine the final or decisive answer to the question. Apart from the fact that miracles and prophecies are difficult arguments to use in apologetics, they remain extrinsic to the Christian doctrine. We are thus led to wonder whether there is not something inherent in the Christian message itself that appeals to men and accounts for its ability to sway their hearts. If we examine the works of the Fathers, we shall find that, independently of any spectacular miraculous intervention on God's part or any calculation of prophecies, the Christian doctrine possesses in itself a mysterious attraction, capable of compelling the minds and hearts of men, even without the help of external signs, such as miracles and prophecies.[5]

One of the early Christian writers to have been most sensitive to this particular character or quality of the Christian message was Origen. Among the dominating themes of Origen's *Contra Celsum,* his defense of Christianity against the first great intellectual to have attacked the Church, is the emphasis on what Origen calls habitually the "power" of the Word of God. The word of the apostle, like that of Christ, is spoken with power.[6] This power accounts, among other things, for the rapid spread of Christianity during the early centuries. "The word runs quickly." It is capable of overcoming men everywhere; for, since God is the Creator of the whole world, the power of His word extends to all men. It has, in fact, succeeded in overcoming men of all sorts, not only the simple and the uneducated, but the wise and the learned; not only the civilized world, but a large portion of the barbaric nations. The Word, spoken with power, could not be prevented. It conquered despite the opposition of everyone: the emperors and their generals, the governors, the rulers of each city, the soldiers, and the people themselves. It is capable of changing the lives of men,

even to the point of making them despise death. Far from checking its spread, the blood of martyrs constitutes a dramatic proof of its efficacy and of its ability to raise up the souls and minds of men.

Because the Word is powerful by itself, it can dispense with the artifices and literary devices dear to the pagan writers. Its efficaciousness has nothing whatever to do with literary style and composition. In the Apostles was not found any "power of speaking or of giving an ordered narrative by the standards of Greek dialectical or rhetorical arts."[7] If anything, the use of these devices would have merely cast a shadow on the doctrine itself. People would have suspected the Apostles of relying on methods similar to those of the philosophers.[8] The very simplicity of Sacred Scripture is evidence of its divine origin.

The faith of the Apostles in the power of this Word was so great that they did not hesitate to mention in their writings certain facts that were unfavorable to themselves and that might have proved harmful to others, such as the account of Peter's denial. Further, the divine power of the Word is impressed upon us by the fact that it was possible for sorcerers to use the name of Christ and perform the same miracles as his true disciples.[9]

Unlike the teachings of the philosophers, the divine message, however difficult it may be, is intended for, and accessible to, all men. No nature is impervious to the power of the Word. If the latter is not always received, it is not because of any deficiency in the Word itself; it is simply because all men are not equally willing or prepared to accept it. For this reason, without changing in Himself, God changes for men the power of the Word according to the capacities of each individual.[10] Thus, to conclude, we have to admire the power in the message

> when we consider that the doctrines that Celsus calls vulgar have been filled with power as though they were spells, and when we see that the Word turns multitudes all at once from being licentious to living the most tranquil lives, and from being unrighteous to nobility of character, and from being cowards or effeminate to such bravery that they even despise death for the sake of the piety that they believe to be right. God's word worked through them [the Apostles] to change many of those who sin by nature and by habit. Even those who could not be changed by punishment, the Word transformed, shaping and molding them according to his will.[11]

If we analyze this notion, we come to the conclusion that there is a profound difference between the Word of God and the teachings of the philosophers, or between the knowledge that divine faith and theology give us, on the one hand, and the knowledge of God that is accessible to the unaided human reason on the other. The difference consists precisely in the fact that the divine truths are not assimilated by means of a purely intellectual process. By their very nature, they are inseparable from action. Necessarily and inevitably they carry within themselves, on any level, whether it be that of simple faith or of theology proper, an appeal to man's appetite or affectivity. Contrary to all merely human truths, the Word of God is a good, not for the intellect alone, but for the whole person or, as Clement of Alexandria puts it with bold and typical realism, a good "for the bowels." It is, in this emphatic sense, a "good word" or a "saving word;" a word that creates and arouses a challenge in us; a word to which man not only listens, but to which he yields and responds, and by which he is inwardly transformed into the very thing that the word announces and signifies. Differently and more universally stated, the Word of God or this divine truth is at once speculative and practical.[12]

The best way to appreciate the newness and originality of this type of knowledge is to compare it for a moment to the knowledge that the human sciences give us. Let us begin by examining briefly the division of the sciences as we find it, for example, in Aristotle.[13] Aristotle starts by dividing them into two broad categories, the theoretical sciences and the practical. The theoretical sciences are the ones in which knowledge is sought for its own sake. The word "theoretical" is derived from the Greek word *theoria,* which originally meant a procession (it still retains that meaning in certain modern languages). A procession is something very solemn that you look at; indeed, you don't do anything but look at it. The practical sciences are the ones in which knowledge is sought not for its own sake, but for the sake of something else—for the sake of action. Among the theoretical sciences, we find mathematics, natural philosophy (physics) and metaphysics. Among the practical sciences, we have ethics, economics and politics. The knowledge obtained in the theoretical sciences is higher than the knowledge obtained in the practical sciences; and among the theoretical sciences themselves, metaphysics is the highest. (I must apologize for reminding you of these simple things. I do so, not only because this has a direct bearing on what we are going to say, but because

these ideas are no longer accepted by most people today. If you pick up any college catalogue and look at the offerings in philosophy, you find something completely different: epistemology, logic, ethics, aesthetics, philosophy of language, philosophy of religion, philosophy of history, etc. The great difference is that the distinction between theory and practice is obliterated. We can take Francis Bacon's famous dictum, "Knowledge is power," as a symptom of what has been happening. As for metaphysics, everybody knows that it is usually dismissed as a lot of hocus pocus.)

The Church Fathers, who were for the most part Platonists rather than Aristotelians, follow a slightly different scheme. The most conspicuous difference between Plato and Aristotle here is that there does not seem to be any science of natural things in the strict sense for Plato. (This is expressed in mythical fashion in the doctrine of the transmigration of souls in the *Timaeus.)* That is why perhaps there are so few considerations on the world of nature in the Church Fathers. But this difference is irrelevant to our discussion and we can simply disregard it here. The point that needs to be emphasized, and on which there is universal agreement among the early Christians who discuss these problems, is that there is an irreducible distinction between theory or contemplation on the one hand, and action or practice on the other. We have here two basically different approaches to reality. No form of human knowledge combines, in a single act, the certitude of scientific knowledge and the rectification of the appetite that is the proper mark of the practical sciences. No single human science possesses, at one and the same time, the distinctive perfections of both groups. This cleavage, this fundamental dualism, this insurmountable hiatus between thought and action, is, in fact (as we know from literature and from our own experience), the source of our most persistent and nagging difficulties. Man has always been haunted by the Faustian dream of a supreme knowledge in which the absolute certitude and immutability of the most perfect theoretical science would be joined to the immediate usefulness of the most practical science—by the dream of a science whose sole possession would render him not only wise and learned but good.

In the case of divine knowledge, and only there, do we have this combination of both elements, the speculative and the practical. By this, I do not mean that certain parts of the Bible or of theology—for example, the first chapter of Genesis or the treatise on the Trinity—are theoretical, and that other parts, such as the Book of Proverbs with its manifold precepts or the treatise on the virtues, are practical. This is of course true in one sense. Some parts of the Bible or of theology deal with human actions and hence with operables, whereas others do not. More profoundly, what is meant is that the Bible and theology are speculative and practical in *all* their parts. The divine truths are never purely theoretical. Even a doctrine as lofty and as apparently abstract as the Trinity retains this eminently practical character and cannot be studied in a detached manner, as one would study a geometrical demonstration, let us say. For, although God is not an operable, our consideration of Him will not be adequate until we see Him as a good. We know this already from the place occupied by the Trinity in the lives of some of the greatest mystics. (It is indicative of the decline of theological knowledge in the modern period that books have had to be written to remind us that even mysteries like that of the Trinity are capable of nourishing one's spiritual life. I mention here only those of Father Gaston Salet, because they have recently been translated into English.[14]) All these truths are salutary or beatifying truths, truths that are seen in their proper light only when they are perceived as valuable and desirable.

All of this is hardly more than a restatement, and an attempt to explain in theological language a doctrine that is as old as the oldest book of the Bible. One is confronted with the theme of the efficaciousness of the Word of God on the very first page of the Old Testament, and it is not an exaggeration to say that this idea underlies all of Sacred Scripture. When, for example, the prophets use the familiar expression "the knowledge of God" and accuse their contemporaries of not knowing God, they are not referring to any lack of clear and distinct ideas about God on their part. The knowledge in question rather designates a particular relationship to God; it is knowledge of the heart, and by "heart" the biblical writers mean the very core of one's personality—that which is deepest and most intimate in him. To know someone in this sense is to acknowledge that he means something to us, that he makes a claim on our devotion. This whole idea that the divine Word is always creative or productive of something is nowhere more beautifully expressed in the Old Testament than in the following verses from Isaiah: "For, as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and returns not thither without having watered the earth and made it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out of my mouth—it shall not return to me fruitless, without having done the thing that I pleased, and accomplishing the purpose for which I sent it."[15]

The same teaching becomes more explicit, if that is possible, and more varied in the New Testament. "For my part," says St. Paul, "I came among you in weakness and with a great deal of fear and trembling, and my teaching and message were not put in plausible, philosophical languages, but they were attended with

convincing spiritual power, so that your faith might rest, not on human philosophy, but on the power of God."[16] The first Epistle to the Thessalonians states likewise: "For we know, brothers whom God so loves, that He has chosen you, for our preaching of the good news did not come to you as mere words but with power and the Holy Spirit and full of conviction."[17] The same idea occurs in Romans: "For it (the Gospel) is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, to Jew first, and then to Greek."[18] We find it again in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "For the message of God is a living and active force, sharper than any double-edged sword, piercing through soul and spirit, and joints and marrow, and keen in judging the thoughts and purposes of the mind."[19]

Of all the New Testament writers, it is perhaps St. John who has developed this idea with the greatest penetration and richness of symbolism. It is suggested not only by the miracles performed by Christ, but in a massive way by the two great themes around which the whole Gospel is built, the themes of light and life. Commenting on John 8:12, "I am the light of the world; he who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life," St. Augustine writes:

> For bodily use, light and fountain are different things: our mouths seek a fountain, our eyes light. When we thirst we seek a fountain, when we are in darkness, we seek light. And if we chance to thirst in the night, we kindle a light to come to a fountain. Not so with God: light and fountain are the same thing: He who shines for you that you may see, the Same flows for you that you may drink.[20]

Augustine's distinction between light and life, or light and fountain, parallels exactly our distinction between word and deed, or theory and practice; and his remarks on this subject sum up in a vivid and remarkably clear fashion everything that we have said thus far.

What I would like to do now is to show, by means of two examples, how the doctrine that we have presented is reflected in the works of the Church.

The first of these examples is found in St. Augustine's work, *On Christian Learning (De doctrina Christiana)*. The work is divided into two parts. Part I, which comprises Books I-III, is a treatise of exegesis. The author discusses here the manner of discovering the truths contained in Sacred Scripture. Part II is a short treatise on preaching (or homiletics). It deals with the manner of presenting to others the truths discovered in Sacred Scripture. The book as a whole is noteworthy for many reasons, not the least of which is that it contains the first manual of exegesis, as well as the first manual of homiletics written during the patristic age. Moreover, it is not without interest to study Augustine's views on both of these topics, since he is not only one of the great exegetes but also one of the most illustrious preachers of Christianity. (Sermons of his could be found in the most remote corners of the Roman Empire. Circus owners were careful to avoid conflicts with his preaching, lest they should lose a large portion of their spectators. This was no mean accomplishment, especially in view of the fact that, as Paul Claudel once put it, one of the greatest proofs of the divinity of the Church is the fact that it spread through preaching.)

The point to which I wish to call your attention occurs in Book IV. It has to do with the difference in the treatise on preaching precisely, between sacred oratory and profane oratory, and, ultimately, with the difference between divine knowledge and purely human knowledge. This difference is all the more remarkable since scholars have often expressed disappointment with this part of Augustine's work and have dismissed it as being a mere rehash of Cicero's views on rhetoric, devoid of any originality. There are, as a matter of fact, many borrowings from Cicero, "the prince of Roman eloquence," as Augustine calls him, in *On Christian Learning.* In particular, Augustine takes over from Cicero two distinctions that are fundamental to the argument of the whole book. The first has to do with the end of oratory which, according to Cicero, is threefold: to instruct, to move (persuade), and to please. To this threefold end correspond the three styles employed by the orator: the simple or subdued, the moderate, and the sublime.[21] The innovation introduced by Augustine concerns the ends of the art of rhetoric. For Cicero, the most important of these ends is the second, namely, to persuade. In this respect, Cicero remains faithful to the ancient tradition (the first great monument to which is Aristotle's *Rhetoric),* which defined rhetoric as the art of persuasion. The first end, to teach, is a mere necessity. By this, Cicero means that in pleading a case, one must begin by presenting the facts of the case. There is no "teaching" here in the higher or more proper sense of the word. But when we come to Augustine, we suddenly notice that the order of importance has been reversed. The all important thing is to teach; and we have here a teaching in the strict sense, an effort to impart the truth. Persuasion is necessary and is to be used only if the hearer resists or refuses to be moved by the divine truth

that is presented to him. A special effort *must* then be made to induce the proper dispositions in his soul. But of itself, the Word of God, which the preacher has the mission to transmit to his flock, is already capable of moving the hearts of his listeners and of securing their adhesion. This simple departure from the classical tradition (embodied in this case by Cicero) was enough to give to the art of rhetoric an entirely new orientation. Such a departure is wholly unintelligible unless one accepts Augustine's premise of a radical difference between these two different types of knowledge.

The second illustration is taken from Book VII of Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata.* The theme of Book VII is the perfect man, or the highest human type, whom Clement calls the "gnostic." The "gnostic" is the Christian counterpart of the highest type on the purely human level, namely, the philosopher or wise man. Book VII is particularly important because it represents one of the earliest and best attempts to set forth systematically the difference between the most noble pagan ideal and the new Christian ideal. It is also a very difficult book to interpret. Clement himself tells us that he is being deliberately elliptical, that is to say, he is omitting certain things that are somehow essential to the discussion. He thus compels us to look further than his own explicit statements for a full understanding of the book. One of the most important characters of that book, one might say, is Plato. Plato is not mentioned by name, although he is quoted; but then, the most important things in the work of a great writer are not necessarily the ones that are mentioned the most often. (In some cases, they may not be mentioned at all—explicitly.) There are many resemblances between Clement's portrait of the "gnostic" and the description of the philosopher in the central portion of Plato's most comprehensive dialogue, the *Republic.* These resemblances concern such things as truthfulness, moderation, spiritedness, "piety," and various other qualities or virtues. In many ways, the whole seventh book is strangely reminiscent of Plato, although an open discussion with Plato is carefully avoided. We need not go into the reasons why Clement has chosen not to drag his adversary out into the open. Let us simply leave it at saying that, like Plato, Clement does not directly engage in discussion with older men, with his peers. His book is addressed primarily to young men of exceptional promise, to the "golden natures" of which he speaks in the first chapter of the first book.

What, then, distinguishes Clement's gnostic from Plato's philosopher? The first and most obvious difference is that the "gnostic" is not characterized by science *(episteme)* but, as his name indicates, by *gnosis.* The term *gnosis*, which we can translate provisionally by "knowledge," has itself a long and complicated history. It occurs in Plato, but infrequently and without any special meaning or connotation. The origin of this notion, as it appears in Clement and a number of other more or less contemporary Christian writers, is, in fact, biblical. The knowledge to which it refers is, first and foremost, the knowledge of the Scriptures. The gnostic in Clement's sense is the one who has the most profound knowledge of the divine Scriptures. For Clement, to know the Scriptures in this manner means to be able to interpret them allegorically. This allegorical interpretation, although indigenous to the Bible, owes a great deal in its elaboration and formulation to Plato himself. It refers specifically, not to the stupid one-to-one relation that became common among the Stoics, but to the underlying or hidden thoughts contained in the text at hand.[22] The important point, however, is that this knowledge which comes to the gnostic from the Bible differs in two ways from that of the philosopher: it is essentially dependent not on natural gifts but on the grace of God; and it is intimately bound up with love of God and neighbor. For Clement, there is no "abstract" knowledge of God—"abstract" in the modern rather than the Aristotelian sense. It is, in fact, significant that Clement should single out a lack of abstractedness as the one quality that best distinguishes the knowledge of the Christian from that of the philosopher.

The doctrine of the Word, as we have tried to explain it, has come to occupy an important place in contemporary theology, both Catholic and Protestant. Much more remains to be said about it. We have focused our attention only on one aspect of it, albeit an essential aspect. In the few minutes that remain, I shall discuss two more or less recent developments that have greatly contributed to a better understanding of it in our time.

The first of these developments has to do with a proposal made twenty years or so ago by some European theologians to set up, side by side with the traditional scientific theology, another theology that would focus on the concrete, dynamic, and immediately relevant elements of the Christian message. The new theology was called "living theology" *(Lebenstheologie)* or "kerygmatic theology" *(Verkündigungs theologie),* from the word *kerygma,* which in the New Testament designates the proclamation of the Gospel to non-Christians or, in a more general way, the general announcement of the Word of God. The purpose of this endeavor was to render Christianity more effective and more appealing to modern man at large, for whom the arid discussions, scientific disquisitions, and endless hair-splitting of scholastic theology had become meaningless, if not plainly repulsive. By emphasizing, or re-emphasizing, the existential and confrontational aspects of the New Testament message, one could hope to revalorize Christianity in the eyes of a

secularized modern world.

Further attempts were made later on to justify this distinction between dogma and kerygma, or between scientific theology and kerygmatic theology by pointing out that the former was directly concerned with the divinely revealed truth and its rational penetration, whereas the latter was mainly concerned with the divinely revealed good and its practical uses.

This proposal was not a completely new and isolated phenomenon by any means. It simply made people more aware than ever of a situation that was really much older and that had only worsened in the course of recent centuries the divorce between theology and the spiritual life of the Church, to the detriment of both. For four or five centuries at least, the trend had been to confine the scientific and, so to speak, prosaic study of dogma to the schools, while sanctity flourished on its own, as a kind of optional, lyrical, and at certain moments slightly suspect outgrowth of the Christian life. The two dynamic poles of this Christian life, its solid intellectual structure and its piety, which had been intimately bound together in the works of the Fathers and of the great medieval theologians, tended to drift apart and to constitute two independent and unrelated pursuits. Theological science and dialectic were dismissed as pedestrian and uninspired by the mystics, and mysticism was disregarded or frowned upon as an aberration by the more rational and commonsensical practitioners of Christian dogma.

We find a concrete illustration of this division in Father Fulbert Cayré's well-known *Manual of Patrology and History of Theology,* now in the process of being completed.[23] The first two volumes of this extensive work, which cover the early Church and the Middle Ages, deal with the life and thought of the Church as a unit. From the fourteenth century onward, however, the author was forced to devote separate volumes to these two aspects of his study. This split between dogma and mysticism was still apparent at a very recent date. When the people of my generation began to study theology a few years ago, they were usually reminded that, in addition to the books assigned for their courses, they should read something more inspirational and more relevant to their future ministry. One of my teachers, who was not only a serious scholar but an apostle and a man of God, proceeded to recommend two or three works by seventeenth-century authors, one of which was entitled characteristically, *Affective Theology*.[24] The young student thus ended up with two theologies, one for the classroom and his study chamber, and another for the pulpit and his *prie-dieu.* Happy the man who could reconcile the two, assuming that he ever got to the second. The situation has since improved considerably, but it would be rash to say that traces of the old dichotomy have disappeared completely.

From all that we said earlier, it is possible to see how such a rift between theology and mysticism is more than just an historical accident; it is a permanent temptation of the Christian mind. God's knowledge and all the participations thereof—beatific vision, prophecy, faith, theology—are inalienably and indivisibly speculative and practical, which is just another way of saying that in them truth is inseparable from goodness. In the case of the participated forms, however, this truth is received in a mind for which the speculative and the practical represent two radically different modes of operation, and which, for this reason, has a natural and recurring tendency to put asunder what God has joined together. This tendency becomes more pronounced as one draws further away from the source of divine knowledge. It is most likely to appear on a lower level, such as that of theology. It is precisely this tendency that gives rise to decadent "scholastic" theologies, to take the word "scholastic" in its derogatory meaning, as it is often used today to designate excessive technicality and pettifoggery in theological matters. By the same token, it is obvious that the solution to the problem is not to rend the seamless garment of theology, but to restore this science to its pristine unity and integrity. Few things are more foreign to the spirit and to the letter of the Fathers than the idea of two distinct and, for all practical purposes, unrelated sciences of divine things. What we find in their works is a keen awareness of the difference between the scientific mode of the professional theologian and the common understanding of the simple or semi-educated person and, likewise, the frequent recommendation that newcomers to the faith should not be burdened with all sorts of abstruse or peripheral questions. All this does not alter the fact that theology is one habit, as the scholastics taught, combining in a unique fashion, by reason of its own eminent perfection, two perfections that, on a strictly human level, are destined to remain forever isolated and disjoined. The many recent discussions and controversies among theologians have made this point increasingly clear, and, to my knowledge, no one today speaks or dreams of a separate kerygmatic theology in the sense in which it was originally conceived in the late thirties and the early forties.

The rediscovery of the dynamic and affective character of theological knowledge, which constitutes the most legitimate aspiration of kerygmatic theology was made possible, at least to a limited extent, by another development, deeply rooted in modern thought and enormously influential today, and that is what

we might call the discovery of history. I refer here to the discovery of History with a capital "H" during the second half of the nineteenth century. The most popular form of this movement at the present time is existentialism. For the sake of clarity and convenience, however, it may be preferable to limit ourselves to a few remarks about its first great representative, who also happens to be the greatest critic of modern civilization: Friedrich Nietzsche.

Nietzsche's self-proclaimed superiority over all other philosophers past or present is predicated on his alleged insight into the fundamental and inescapable historicity of all human thought. The philosophers of the past differed from one another, and sometimes widely. These disagreements notwithstanding, they all had one thing in common: they all thought they had discovered the truth. They unanimously regarded philosophy as a theoretical activity whose function it is to perceive a pre-existing order; and they claimed to have revealed this order more perfectly than their predecessors. This, says Nietzsche, is an illusion. There is no such thing as a pre-existing truth or a pre-existing order. The philosophers did not perceive reality, they created or interpreted it. All philosophy and all knowledge are interpretation. This is true in some way even of Nietzsche's own philosophy. The only difference, the manifestly new thing, is that Nietzsche is the only one who knows this. The philosophers of the past did not know it. They were dogmatic and naive. In Nietzsche's own words, they were beautiful and strong asses, that is to say, they had strong but unfounded convictions.[25] The philosophies of the past are nothing more than an indefinite variety of points of view none of which is demonstrably superior to the others.[26]

Nietzsche arrives at this conclusion roughly in the following manner. The philosophers analyze reality. In so doing, they are forced to make certain presuppositions. These presuppositions are themselves historically conditioned and hence not subject to analysis. All thought rests on premises ultimately inspired by history, by fate. All thought thus belongs to a specific horizon which it cannot transcend or from which it cannot escape. To state the same thing in Platonic terms, all thought belongs to the cave. One cannot speak of a universally valid science or philosophy. This is equivalent to saying that all truth rests, in the final analysis, on a certain option, a choice, a creative act of the will. These creative acts are the unconditioned condition of everything. All truth is prompted, according to Nietzsche's famous phrase, by the "will to power." This is the fundamental fact, the "text," as opposed to the interpretation.

What Nietzsche is proposing, then, is not just a new philosophy, but a new type of philosophy. Philosophy ceases to appear as a purely theoretical pursuit, an activity of the pure mind or of the cognitive faculty alone, that is to say, without the will. It becomes the work of the whole man, of his fundamental will. There is no understanding without willing, no intelligibility prior to or independent of one's decision or commitment.

Whatever may be wrong with Nietzsche' s position—and no doubt there are many things wrong with it—it cannot be denied that it has exerted an enormous influence on subsequent thought, either directly or through Nietzsche's most famous continuator, Heidegger. History has become, along with science, one of the two great forces of the modern world, if not the greatest. What Nietzsche did, in effect, was to attack science in the name of life. Science is hostile to involvement, and since life is involvement, science is hostile to life. The result is an extreme valuation of life in action at the expense of science and thought. Nietzsche attempted to solve the dilemma of thought and action in favor of action by asserting the essentially derivative and subordinate character of thought to action. He thus raised once again in a novel and most striking fashion the central question of the collaboration of the intellect and the will. As such, his views are of the utmost interest to the Christian theologian.

Nietzsche's thought is, of course, profoundly anti-Christian. This is already true, though less apparently so, of Nietzsche's first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*. It is correct to say that Nietzsche was trying to purge modern atheistic thought of its last remnants of Christianity. He was particularly opposed to modern democratic and egalitarian ideas, which he regarded as a mere carry-over from Christianity, and which would never have existed without it. The modern philosophies that advocate these ideas can thus be viewed as Christian heresies. For such ideas there was no room in Nietzsche's dream of planetary rule by a new aristocracy. In this respect, Nietzsche was even more anti-Christian than Marx. What he tried to do was to create an atheistic right—something that had never existed prior to that time. However true all this may be, there is still one Christian element that subsists in some distorted way in Nietzsche's thought, and that is his conception of knowledge founded on will. Paradoxically, Nietzsche's whole anti-Christian effort is based on a christianization of philosophy.

How, then, does Nietzsche's position differ from that of the Church Fathers and the great writers of the Christian tradition in general? Nietzsche used science to destroy all science and the very possibility of science, and became the most anti-rationalist or anti-intellectual philosopher of modern times. The one

great difference that separates him forever from the Christian theologian concerns precisely the status of truth in the Christian message. The truth to which the theologian has access through divine revelation is not a mere fiction or the product of any creative act on his part. It originates in God and imposes itself upon the mind with a cogency and an inner certitude that is infinitely superior to that of any natural truth. Its objectivity is in no way imparted or lessened by its subjective appeal; and its acceptance represents, not the destruction but a supreme enhancement of reason.

In a devious and somewhat ironical way, which the Church Fathers would have enjoyed, Nietzsche paved the way for a return to a more authentically Christian theology. The movement that he originated was so powerful that it led in some instances to a depreciation of the intellectual component of Christian thought. The most notorious example of this deviation is the heresy known as modernism, with its characteristic denial of the immutability of dogmas. But in the long run, Nietzschean thought may prove to have had the deeper and more salutary effect of helping us to perceive, with greater clarity than ever, the originality of the Christian message, which alone reconciles perfectly the necessity of scientific knowledge and the attachment of love. For all its appeal to the deepest wellsprings of the human heart, this message retains its character of eternal truth, revealed in time. It is a message that lends itself to and calls for intellectual penetration and elaboration, whether we call it *gnosis* with the Alexandrines or *sapientia* with Augustine.

We began our discussion of the nature of the Christian message with the remark that Christianity implanted itself through the use of persuasion or rhetoric. We are perhaps in a better position now to understand the real meaning of this early Christian rhetoric. True Christian rhetoric is no mere propaganda (which is the opposite of rationality), and it is more than just a superior rhetoric: it is a radically different rhetoric, just as Christian wisdom is a radically different wisdom. This rhetoric was intrinsically edifying, in a way in which philosophy could never be. Like Christ, Who was Himself the Word of God incarnate, and Whose own words, as St. Luke tells us, were spoken "with power,"[27] it was all at once light and salvation *(lux et salus),* science and proclamation, dogma and kerygma.

NOTES

1 *Rerum Ecclesiae* 21. Editor's Note: "The Christian Message" is the second of two lectures (see chapter one above for the first) delivered on February 3, 1961, for the Program for Christian Culture, St. Mary's College, South Bend, Indiana.

2 Plato, *Republic* VI.488a-489a.

3 Cf. Machiavelli, *The Prince,* chap. 25.

4 Augustine, *De civitate* Dei XXII.5.

5 Cf. Guy de Broglie, *De virtute fidei* (Paris: Institut catholique, n.d.), 23.

6 *Contra Celsum* I.73.

7 Ibid. I.62.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid. II.49.

10 Ibid. IV.18.

11 Ibid. III.68.

12 Or yet another way to state the matter is that the word is both *logos* and *ergon,* originally an ironical distinction used to characterize the philosopher in Plato's dialogues.

13 Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I.982a5-983a20, II.993b21-30; VI.1025b1-1026a30.

14 Cf. Gaston Salet, S.J., *The Wonders of Our Faith* (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1961).

15 Isaiah 55:10-11.

16 I Cor. 2:4.

17 I Thess. 1:4-5.

18 Rom. 1:16.

19 Heb. 4:12.

20 *Tractatus in Joan. Ev*.XIII.5.

21 Cf. Cicero, *Orator* XXI.69; *De oratore* II.77.310; *Brutus* 185; *De optimo genere Or* 1.3.

22 Editor's Note: The original manuscript contains the following sentence: "Illustrate by means of examples from the *Republic."*

23 *Manual of Patrology and History of Theology,* 2 vols., ed. Fulbert Cayré, A.A., trans. H. Howitt (Paris: Society of St. John the Evangelist, Desclée & Co., 1936-40).

24 Editor's Note: Fortin could be referring to any number of works from the period, e.g., Laurentius Neesen, *Theologia Christiana affectiva de Deo uno in essentia, trio in personis, et verbo incarnato ad mentem SS. Augustini et Thomae* (Cotoniæ Agrippinæ: Sumptibus Balth. ab Egmont & sociorum, 1678); or Ludovicus Bail, *Theologia affectiva, das ist anmühtige Erkantnüs göttlicher Dingen* (Cöllen: F. Metternich, 1715).

25 *Beyond Good and Evil* chap. 1, section 8.

26 Cf. ibid., chap. 1.

27 Lk. 4:32.

4

THE "RHETORIC" OF THE CHURCH FATHERS

In a note to her brother, dated August 5, 1828, Jemima, Newman's sister, included the following request from their younger sister Mary: "Mary begs that the next time you write you will be so kind as to enlighten her on the uses of reading the Fathers."[1] Newman was a student at Oxford at the time and he had recently undertaken an extensive study of patristic literature. There is unfortunately no record of his reply to Mary, who was to die the following year at the age of seventeen. Since then, Mary's question has been asked many times and it has received a great variety of answers.

It is obvious that the early Christian writers were first and foremost "sowers of the divine word." What one loves above all in their works is, in Augustine's phrase, "the truth in the words and not the words themselves"—*in verbis verum amare et non verba*.[2] Christianity is not primarily a culture but a doctrine and a way of life. In the books of men whose mission it was to implant Christianity in a pagan world, in "our books," as they were called, literary beauty and niceties of style could only be of secondary importance.

ASSESSMENTS OF PATRISTIC LITERATURE

For this reason, perhaps, the Church Fathers were thought for a long time to lie outside the pale of literature. Their appeal was to the pious man or to a small group of dusty scholars engaged in a spooky, esoteric, and somewhat disreputable pursuit known as *Wissenschaft.* The classicists had been taught to keep a respectable distance; their attitude was summed up in a haughty or at best reserved, *nec nominentur in nobis*.[3] If we go back some seventy-five years we find that, as a matter of fact, the names of Christian writers are for the most part scrupulously omitted from the histories of Latin literature. The classic work of James Duff, still widely used today, is characteristic enough of the spirit that prevailed: the golden age of Latin literature culminates in Cicero and its silver age in Tacitus.[4] One can only shudder at the thought of what comes after that. If Cicero is gold and Tacitus silver, then surely Tertullian must be lead.

In the course of the nineteenth century, however, one begins to detect a change of heart among classical scholars. Christian writers receive an honorable mention, in the form of a short appendix, in the works of Bähr in Germany[5] and of Nageotte in France.[6] A second important stride in the same direction was accomplished some years later with the manuals of Teuffel and of Pichon, both of whom look upon the Christians as forming an integral part of Latin literature and devote substantial sections to them.[7] The final *imprimatur* came with De Labriolle's well-known *Histoire de la littérature latine chrétienne,* the first edition of which appeared in 1920.[8] Today it would be difficult to find a single survey of Latin literature which does not encompass the Christian period in greater or less detail. Traces of the old spirit have not disappeared completely; of the 460 pages of Moses Hadas' *History of Latin Literature,*[9] only forty go to the Christian authors. But on the whole historians have become increasingly generous towards them. One hundred and fifty of the seven hundred odd pages in Bayet's manual deal with the Christian period.[10] One of the interesting features of the book is that it incorporates a concept of now proven value, that of the Theodosian Renaissance, under which the writers of the golden age of patristic literature are treated. Such is esteem in which the Christians are held as writers in some quarters that Professor Baxter, of the University of St. Andrew's, has even gone so far as to suggest, half seriously and half in jest, that the two greatest authors of Latin literature are Tertullian and Julian of Eclanum, the villain of the second Pelagian controversy who literally poisoned the last years of Augustine's life.

Oddly enough, the modern scholars who took a negative view of the Christians as writers seem to have taken their cue from the Church Fathers themselves. As soon as it began to acquire its definitive shape in the third century, Christian literature was compared to secular literature and found wanting. In his *Confessions,* St. Augustine tells us that when, as a young man, he directed his attention to Sacred Scripture to see what it was like, he found it "unworthy of being compared to the Ciceronian standard of value."[11] And we observe the same reaction towards all other forms of Christian writing. In the words of Celsus, the

first great pagan intellectual to have attacked Christianity, what could be expected in the way of humane letters from a people composed largely, if not exclusively, of "wool-workers, cobblers, laundry-workers, and the most illiterate and bucolic yokels who would not dare say anything in front of their elder and more intelligent masters"?[12]

PAGAN RESISTANCE

Our own enlarged view of the literary phenomenon has taken much of the venom out of this objection and it has all but made it impossible for us to understand the power of the classical prejudice in which it was rooted. Still, it would be difficult to overemphasize its importance for the pagan mind. Steeped in a tradition which looked upon rhetoric in its broad and comprehensive sense with its ideal of correctness and distinction as cultured man's highest acquirement, and upon the orator himself as the most accomplished human type, the pagan disciple of the Muses could only feel repugnance for the works of these Galileans with outlandish names and uncouth manners who had begun to overrun the Empire. In words which were repeated many times during the long Indian summer of ancient civilization, Plato had once hailed this culture as man's chief and most remarkable possession. In due time, this culture had come to epitomize the values of civilization and of Hellenism, to which the pagan elite had begun to cling desperately now that they were threatened and in danger of being permanently lost.

Here, it seems, lay the main obstacle to the conversion of that pagan elite. The real rivals of the one true God in the minds and hearts of men were no longer the deities of the Greco-Roman pantheon, in whom educated persons had long since ceased to believe, whatever lip service they may have continued to pay to them. (One does not ask whether a fairy tale is true or false.) Into the niches which they still occupied had crept another god, less perceptible to the naked eye, but all the more dangerous for that reason, namely, pagan culture itself raised to the level of an absolute and idolized as the supreme norm of the good life. In Augustine's list, it is precisely this cult of the Muses, this religion which takes as its object the perfection of the rational soul which constitutes the last and the most fearful of the forces then competing for the hearts of men.

It is with these ideas in mind, perhaps, that we best understand why the Christian apologists of the end of antiquity were so strenuously opposed to the obsolete gods of the pagan city. The esthetic appeal which they retained made of them the final embodiment of the spirit of evil which they must strive to eradicate. If the thought that these gods did not exist never entered their minds, it is precisely because they saw in them the means by which the devil continued to assert his domination over the world. In this sense, the trouble with the pagan deities is that they were only too real.

Some noble souls, it cannot be denied, attempted to react against this esthetic bias. Marcus Aurelius once boasted of his "habit of not finding fault, and of not using abusive language, to those who utter a barbarous or awkward or unmusical phrase."[13] But that he should have taken pride in his open-mindedness is itself an indication of the power exercised by this prejudice on pagan sensibilities.

PATRISTIC RESPONSES

Confronted with the situation just described, the Church Fathers could take one of two courses. The first was to concede that from the point of view of literary form, the works of the Christians were indeed inferior, but that since their chief concern was with the truth and not with the manner in which it was expressed, this inferiority mattered little in the end. The business of St. Matthew was to formulate dogmas and not to scurry after words and syllables. Writing to his old teacher Libanius, St. Basil feels obliged to apologize for the style of his letter in these terms: "The truth is, I have been in the company of Moses and Elias and men of that kind, who tell us no doubt what is true, but in a barbarous dialect, so that your instructions have quite gone out of my head."[14] In the ascetic and monastic literature of the period, eloquence and literary preoccupations become something like a capital sin. Cassian, the legitimate father of Western monasticism, thought it his duty to warn his monks against three things: a) women—and this requires little explanation; b) bishops, who were forever seeking to woo the monks away from their monasteries to ordain them priests;[15] and c) masters of Ciceronian eloquence, who may seduce them with their captious language and smooth-sounding phrases. The words of these sophists are really the pods with which the prodigal son longed to fill himself before coming back to his senses and returning to his father's house,[16] or the gold which Achan found among the spoils of Jericho and sought to appropriate before being struck down.[17] Deeds, not words, characterize the Christian and the plainness of his speech and style stem from their profound sanctity.[18] A similar attitude is reflected in the spurious *Correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul,* one of the pious frauds of the fourth century, which describes Seneca's admiration for the contents of St. Paul's Epistles despite their hopeless lack of concern for formal beauty.[19] St. Paul accepts the

compliment and in return promises to make every effort to improve his style.

It soon became obvious, however, that this solution would not satisfy everyone for long and a second solution, which was to prove more sober and realistic than the attitude of "noble simplicity" advocated by the first group, began to gain ground. Many of the Christian writers were themselves products of the pagan school. Some of them—Tertullian (perhaps), Amobius, Lactantius, and Augustine, to mention only a few—had been professors of rhetoric. As firmly convinced as they may have been of the superiority of the Christian Faith, they realized that they could never dispense completely with the artifices of style if they hoped to reach the more cultured segments of pagan society. Rhetoric could be a noisome thing in the hands of an adversary, but as Augustine was quick to point out, if it served to propagate error, by the same token it could be used in the cause of truth:

> For since by the means of rhetoric both truth and falsehood are urged, who would dare to say that truth should stand in the person of its defenders unarmed against lying, so that they who wish to urge falsehoods may know how to make their listeners benevolent, or attentive, or docile in their presentation, while the defenders of truth are ignorant of that art? Should they speak briefly, clearly, and plausibly while the defenders of truth speak so that they tire their listeners, make themselves difficult to understand and what they have to say dubious? Should they oppose the truth with fallacious arguments and assert falsehoods, while the defenders of truth have no ability either to defend the truth or to oppose the false? Should they, urging the minds of their listeners into error, ardently exhort them, moving them by speech so that they terrify, sadden, and exhilarate them, while the defenders of truth are sluggish, cold, and somnolent? Who is so foolish as to think this to be wisdom? While the faculty of eloquence, which is of great value in urging evil or justice, is in itself indifferent, why should it not be obtained for the uses of the good in the service of truth if the evil usurp it for the winning of perverse and vain causes in defense of iniquity and error?[20]

Throughout this passage of the treatise *On Christian Doctrine,* Augustine, one senses, is really grinding an axe. The Donatists in particular, an intellectually unwashed bunch recruited among the lower strata of the North African community, had reproached him with abusing rhetoric. The best commentary on these words is Augustine's own book against the Donatist Cresconius.[21] But his remarks have a more general value and express a feeling that had won widespread acceptance especially among the fourth- and fifth-century writers.

What Augustine says here of rhetoric Gregory of Nyssa had said in almost the same terms of philosophy.[22] The thought which underlies the argument in both cases is summed up in the principle expressed many times from Minucius Felix onward, that the Christian must be prepared to fight the adversaries of the Faith with their own engines.[23] St. Jerome interprets in this manner the episode of David and Goliath in the second book of Kings. It is with the very sword that he has just wrested from his hands that the young shepherd beheads the giant whom he had felled with his sling.[24]

Needless to say, these pagan arts which the Christians are to appropriate will have to be shorn of their trappings and adjusted to the requirements of the Gospel. The treatment to which they must be subjected resembles the one inflicted on the captive woman mentioned in Deuteronomy. An Israelite was permitted by Mosaic law to marry a foreign woman captured in battle, but before she could begin to live with him, she was required to shave her head, pare her nails, and lay aside her captive's garb. If, after a month of this rather harsh treatment, the romance was still on, the two could live together as man and wife.[25]

Upon closer examination, the Bible itself was found to possess a literary value all its own, which had apparently escaped the notice of its earlier detractors. Its authors were by no means the mere "theologizing fishermen" ridiculed by Julian the Apostate. Moses, we are told in the Acts of the Apostles, was well-versed in the lore and learning of the Egyptians,[26] and Daniel equally well-versed in that of the Babylonians. Instead of finding fault at all costs with the sacred text, one began to search it for all sorts of hidden and unsuspected beauties. One by one the strictures were lifted, and in that extraordinary Book IV of the treatise *On Christian Doctrine,* Augustine will find examples of biblical eloquence not only in St. Paul but even in the work of a rustic and presumably illiterate prophet like Amos.[27] The proper names themselves, with their exotic ring, are converted from liabilities into assets. Anticipating our own modern tastes, Augustine suddenly discovers that they present an extraordinary appeal to the ear and to the imagination of

the reader:

> For what more than this eloquence could sober ears desire? First of all, with what force is that invective hurled against those who are as if asleep in their senses that they may awaken! “Woe to you that are wealthy in Sion, and to you that have confidence in the mountains of Samaria: ye great men, heads of the people, that go in with the state into the house of Israel.” Then that he may show them ungrateful for the benefits of God, who gave them ample space, in that they have confidence in the mountains of Samaria where idols are worshiped, he says: “Pass ye over to Chalane and see, and go from thence into Emath the Great, and go down to Geth of the Philistines, and to all the best kingdoms of these: if their border be larger than your border.” And while he is saying those things, the names of places ornament his eloquence like lights: Sion, Samaria, Chalane, Emath the Great, and Geth of the Philistines. Then the words which join these places are most effectively varied: “you that are wealthy,” “have confidence in,” “pass ye over,” “go,” “go down.”[28]

Augustine then goes on to study in like manner his own predecessors and, although he takes an occasional swipe at some of them like Cyprian (whom he rebukes for his turgid style), the upshot of the whole development is that from a strictly esthetic viewpoint, the Christian writers have been unjustly decried and really have much to offer.

SOCRATIC RHETORIC

Thus, on the basis of their own testimony, there seems to be little doubt that we are justified in studying the Church Fathers as writers, and not merely as theologians or witnesses of the Faith. And yet until recent years surprisingly little had been said concerning this subject, as Professor Rapisarda, in his book on Arnobius (published a few years ago) again reminded us.[29] Even De Labriolle’s *Histoire,* however valuable it may be from the point of view of the information that it contains, finally contributed little to our understanding of the specifically literary aspects of the Fathers. Its approach is in the main historical and it hardly ever makes any effort to come to grips with the literary issues raised by the works under scrutiny. It is significant that the author’s introduction deals very competently no doubt, but exclusively with the attitude of the Christian writers toward pagan literature and learning, and not with their own literary merits or deficiencies.

In the time that remains this morning, I should like to draw attention to one aspect only of that general problem, to which due prominence has not always been given; I refer to the rhetoric of the Fathers. The word rhetoric in this context, however, should perhaps be enclosed in quotation marks. Rhetoric, we know, played an all-important part in the life of the ancients, and throughout antiquity innumerable treatises of rhetoric were written, many of which have come down to us in whole or in part. The word *techne,* in fact, used without qualification, designated rhetoric. The rhetoric that I have in mind is not merely the set of rules laid down in these manuals and taught to children in school, the rhetoric whose neck Verlaine wanted to twist. For the sake of convenience, I shall follow St. Augustine, through whose works I first became acquainted with it, and call it Socratic rhetoric.[30]

The general premise on which this Socratic rhetoric rests is that it is exceedingly dangerous to speak the whole truth to all persons at all times. The one thing of which all the ancients without exception were firmly convinced, and which our own highly democratic age sometimes loses sight of, is that all men do not have the natural endowments or the intellectual formation required to understand the highest truths. Nature is, to say the least, highly selective and Calvinistic. These most noble truths are really the preserve of a small group of men who have been gifted with what the philosophers of the past called “good natures” and who are fortunate enough to have received the proper formation in their youth. Origen adverted to the same problem when he stated that it is always dangerous to speak about God.[31] In his own interest as well as that of the person addressed, and out of deference for truth itself, a speaker or writer must exercise the utmost prudence whenever he deals publicly with grave issues. These issues cannot be treated before anyone indiscriminately in an identical manner. To use Augustine’s example, the young man who plunges into these questions without taking the proper precautions will become not studious but curious, not learned but credulous, not wise but skeptical.[32]

What is recommended here is not only that the speaker avoid technical jargon when addressing an audience of nonspecialists, but that he shun certain questions altogether, lest the truth itself become

harmful to the mind that is not ready for it. “For,” says Augustine, “there are some things which, with their full implications, are not understood or are hardly understood, no matter how eloquently they are spoken or how often or how plainly. And these things should never, or only rarely on account of some necessity, be set before a popular audience.”[33]

In private conversation, it is usually easy enough to measure the reaction of the hearer and to lead him by the hand, as it were, to a proper understanding of the truth, assuming that he is capable of such an understanding. The real problem arises when we come to written works. An author’s words, once published, may fall into anybody’s hands and thus be misconstrued or variously distorted. The trouble with a book, as Plato once said, is that it always needs its father to defend it. It answers in the same way all the questions that one may put to it. How can this difficulty be overcome? Should we simply give up the idea of writing about important matters, or is there some way out of the impasse?

Socratic rhetoric, to state things plainly and perhaps bluntly, was designed precisely to obviate this difficulty and provide a means of exposing the truth without danger to anyone or to the truth itself. It consists in a peculiar mode of expression by means of which the most important truths are concealed from those who could not derive any profit from them and allowed to transpire for the few to whom they might conceivably be beneficial. Books written in this fashion contain two teachings, both of which are true and intended by the author: one, an exoteric teaching, which remains on a more superficial and reasonably safe level, and the second a more profound and, although I dislike the word, esoteric teaching.

Although the idea is very common among the Fathers, it is not restricted to them in any sense. Apparently baffled by it, Emile Bréhier sought its origin and finally traced it back to one Diocles of Cnidos, an obscure philosopher whose name I had never heard and about whose dates I am still not sure. Augustine’s suggestion that it harks back to the Socratic fountainhead seems infinitely more plausible, and if we turn for a moment to the works of Plato, we shall have no difficulty in finding it there.

The most formal, but by no means the only, statement to that effect in Plato is that of the *Seventh Epistle,* in which one reads:

> I do not believe that arguing about these points is a good thing for men, save for a small elite who are capable of discovering the truth for themselves with the help of a few intimations. As for the others, we would merely fill them with unjust contempt, which is unbecoming, or with a vain and foolish self-sufficiency by the very sublimity of the teachings imparted.[34]

The *Phaedrus* reverts to the same problem and emphasizes, in this connection, the undeniable superiority of oral teaching over written teaching. In a manner that is infinitely more subtle than these willfully brief remarks suggest, the author explains how the serious man is never fully serious when he is compelled to write and how the true discourses are really the ones that are inscribed in the soul.

Just how the words of Plato should be interpreted has given rise to considerable debate in recent years. From the passages just quoted and others like them, Professor Cherniss has concluded that the dialogues cannot possibly contain Plato’s real thought and that if anyone is interested in discovering that thought, he should look elsewhere for it. The trouble with that suggestion is that it does not give us any satisfactory indication as to where we should look. It is doubtful whether the other sources mentioned by Cherniss are more reliable than the dialogues; and Plato himself, who was conscious of writing not only for his own time but even more perhaps for future generations, never proposed that one search for what he has to say outside of his own works. The key to the enigma may perhaps be found in the reason that he gave for choosing the dialogue form in the first place—because it is the one that comes closest to the oral teaching, in the superiority of which he never ceased to believe. These dialogues are, in fact, imitations of conversations, and by following as closely as possible the drift of the discussion, the perspicacious reader may pick up the various hints calculated to lead him to that truth which every man must discover for himself. This is to say that one cannot always take what is being said at face value. Reading a Platonic dialogue requires listening with the third ear. Each statement must be examined critically and in context, lest one be led to mistake the Piraeus for a man.[35]

SOCRATIC RHETORIC AND PATRISTIC LITERATURE

This, I gather, is what many of the Church Fathers had understood so well and what, to a certain extent, they had practiced themselves. In his argument against Celsus, Origen even seems to condone “white lies”;

and the example of the physician which he uses seems to indicate that he is merely echoing what Plato had to say on the same subject in the third book of the *Republic*: "Truth should be highly valued; if, as we were saying, a lie is useless to the gods, and useful only as a medicine to men, then the use of such medicines would be restricted to physicians; private individuals have no business with them."[36]

Once they had latched on to the idea, the Church Fathers had no difficulty in finding precedent for it in Scripture itself. Recalling the impression that the Bible had made on him in his greener and more foolish years, Augustine recognized that "while readily available to be read by all men, it kept the grandeur of its mastery under a more profound sense" in such a way as to "exercise the study of those who are not light-minded."[37] To divulge these profound meanings of Scripture to those who are incapable of sustaining them is like removing the cover from a well without taking the pains to replace it immediately, as the Book of Proverbs enjoins.[38]

In a letter to his friend Pammachius, St. Jerome is even more explicit.[39] Origen, Methodius, Eusebius, and Apollinaris—not to mention the Latin authors Tertullian, Cyprian, Minucius, Victorinus, Lactantius, and Hilary—were often compelled to say not what they thought but what was needful. In so doing, they were only imitating the Savior, "who had one mode of speech for those that are without and another for those that are within." The allusion is, of course, to the famous passage in Matthew (and Mark) in which Christ explains His use of parables, the purpose of which is to conceal the truth from those to whom it is not given to know the Kingdom of God.[40]

So frequent are the assertions of this kind in the works of the Fathers that one historian has charged that the entire ecclesiastical literature of the first centuries had become "tainted with a spirit of the most unblushing mendacity."[41] Augustine, as it happens, had foreseen the objection and attempted to forestall it. In both of his treatises on lies he is careful to point out that it is one thing to utter a falsehood and another to conceal the truth.

> Every man who lies conceals the truth, but a man who conceals the truth does not necessarily lie. When Christ said: "Many things yet I have to say to you, but you cannot hear them now" (John 16:12), He remained silent on certain truths, but He did not speak any untruth. On the other hand, if He had not stated the reason why He chose to remain silent, we might perhaps ignore that we have the right to do so, or at least we would not have this noble example upon which to model our own conduct.[42]

Unlike Origen, Augustine is not prepared to tolerate even little white lies but, when all is said and done, it is doubtful whether there is any real disagreement between them.

If we look at the *City of God,* we shall find that Augustine read not only the Platonists in this manner but Cicero as well. One of the clearest illustrations of his method occurs in Book V of that work.[43] Dealing with the question of divine foreknowledge and its reconciliation with free will, Augustine points out what appears to be a lack of consistency on Cicero's part. In the *De natura deorum,* Cicero upholds the doctrine of the prescience of future events and politely leaves to Cotta the odium of denying the existence of the divinity, whereas in his treatise *On Divination,* he in his own person most openly opposes the doctrine of divine foreknowledge rather than destroy man's free will. Thus, concludes Augustine, wishing to make men free he makes them sacrilegious. How can these diverging views be explained? To say that Cicero had reconsidered his position and changed his mind would be pointless. Apart from the fact that such a solution is rarely convincing, the two works in question were written at approximately the same time and perhaps even in the same year. In supporting the Stoic position against Cotta in the very public discussion of the *De natura deorum,* Cicero was merely adjusting to the opinion of the many and using Cotta as his spokesman. It seems much more reasonable to suppose that both books really defend the same views. In any event, there is little doubt in Augustine's mind as to where Cicero's sympathy lay. It was not the first time, or the last, that an author had used such a device. The great literature of the past is filled with fools, knaves, drunkards, and assorted rejects who utter astonishingly serious opinions.

What Augustine says here of Cicero we ourselves may apply to Augustine. The way in which an author reads another author is in most cases a fairly good indication of the way in which he writes, and may provide a clue as to how we should approach his own work. Recent research has shown, as a matter of fact, that there is more to the *City of God* than meets the eye. Augustine first conceived his book as a defense of the Christian Faith against the new attacks under which it had come on the part of the pagan faction after the capture of Rome by Alaric. As such, it constitutes what is undoubtedly the most brilliant and

comprehensive work of apologetics of the patristic era. What is equally important, albeit less obvious, however, is that Augustine very ably and subtly takes issue with his own coreligionists on the crucial issue of history. What finally goes out the window is not only the pagan view of history, which no Christian could reasonably share, but much of the current Christian speculation on the same matter. The first task could be undertaken at no great risk to anyone in Augustine's day; the second, that of refuting the Christians themselves, might have proved more delicate had it not been handled with the superb mastery of a man who had not forgotten the old teachers whose lessons, we know from his biographer Possidius, he still recited on his death bed.[44]

The one thing wisdom does not do foolishly is to overlook the power of folly. Like Plato's philosopher, what the Fathers feared above all else was the "lie in the soul,"[45] and they avoided it all the more carefully since the one being before whom they would never want to blush is not just the strange little creature who dwelled inside of them as had dwelled inside of Socrates, but the One whom they knew would search their hearts in eternity.

NOTES

1 Editor's Note: I have been unable to ascertain when or where "The 'Rhetoric' of the Fathers" was first presented, though judging by the dates of the citations and the appearance of the manuscript it was likely around the time of "The Church Fathers and the Transmission of the Christian Message" and "The Nature of the Christian Message."

2 *De doctrina Christiana* IV.11.26. The next line is, "For what good is a gold key if it cannot open what we want?"

3 Cf. Eph. 5:3.

4 *Silva Latina: A Latin Reading-Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912).

5 Johann Christian Felix Bähr, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur* (Carlsruhe: C. F. Müller, 1832).

6 Eugène Nageotte, *Histoire de la littérature latine depuis ses origines jusqu'au VIe siècle de notre ère* (Paris: Garnier, 1885).

7 W.S. Teuffel, *Geschichte der römischen literatur,* 3 vols. (Leipzig-Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 1912-16); René Pichon, *Histoire de la littérature latine* (Paris: Hachette et cie, 1897).

8 Pierre Champagne de Labriolle, Paris: Belles-Lettres.

9 New York: Columbia University Press, 1952.

10 Jean Bayet, *Littérature latine: histoire, pages choisies traduites et commentées* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1934).

11 *Confess.* III.5.9.

12 Origen, *Contra Celsum* III.55.

13 *Meditations* I.10.

14 *Ep.* 139.

15 *Instituta* XI.18.

16 Cf. Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* VII.218.

17 *Collationes* 1.20.

18 Cf. *Instituta* XII. 19.

19 Chap. 13; cf. 7.

20 *De doctrina Christiana* IV.2.3.

21 *Contra Cresconium.*

22 Editor's Note: Possibly *Life of Moses* II. 7-8, 115. Perhaps Fortin instead had in mind Gregory of Nazianzus, who likens philosophy and pagan education to an instrument that can be used well or ill (*Oration 43*: *Panegyric on St. Basil* 11).

23 Cf. Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 39.

24 *Ep*. 70.2.

25 Deut. 21:10. Cf. Jerome, op. cit.

26 Acts 7:22.

27 IV.7.16.

28 Ibid., IV.7.17.

29 Emanuele Rapisarda, *Arnobio* (Catania: G. Crisafulli, 1946).

30 Editor's Note: Most likely, *Contra Academicos* III. 17.37: "Socratic charm and subtlety" (*lepos subtilitasque socratica*).

31 Origen, *Homil. in Ezech.* I.11. Origen's words are quoted from Sextus, *Sent.* 352; cf. Henry Chadwick, *The Sentences of Sextus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 52.

32 *De ordine* II.5.17.

33 *De doctrina Christiana* IV.9.23.

34 *Seventh Letter* 341 e.

35 Editor's Note: Fortin added a margin note here which reads: "If time permitted, we could show more concretely how this may be done."

36 *Republic* III.389b (translation taken from *Plato's The Republic,* trans. Benjamin Jowett [New York: The Modern Library, 1941]); Origen, *Contra Celsum* IV.19.

37 *Confessiones* VI.5.8.

38 Editor's Note: Prov. 26:27?

39 *Ep*. 18.13.

40 Matt. 13:10-11; Mk. 4:10-11.

41 W.E.H. Lecky, *The History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe,* vol. 1 (New York: D. Appleton, 1866), 393-94.

42 *Contra mendacium* X.23.

43 Cf. ibid. V.9.

44 Cf. *Vita Sancti Augustini* 28, which recounts Augustine loosely citing Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.4.7.23-4.

45 Plato, *Republic* 11.382b.

5

SAINT AUGUSTINE AND THE NEOPLATONIC DOCTRINE OF THE SOUL: LETTER 137.11

In a communication presented to the International Augustinian Congress,[1] Père Couturier draws attention to the originality of Augustine's conception of the unity of the human composite.[2] The problem can be summarized as follows: Augustine employs divergent formulations to express the relations between the two elements that constitute man, the soul and the body. Some of these formulations arise from the "scheme of accidental union," such as Plato conceived it: they define man by the soul only and make of the body a mere instrument of the soul, as in the famous formulation of *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae*—"man is a rational soul that uses a mortal and earthly body."[3] Others, such as the one in *De ordine*—"man is a rational, mortal animal"[4]—presuppose a closer contact between the soul and the body and suggest instead a mode of substantial union in the manner of Aristotle (543). Did Saint Augustine contradict himself, or did he elaborate an original teaching "capable of entering into all formulations without doing violence to any" (544)?

After investigating the question, Père Couturier thinks one must opt for the latter solution: the unity of man is "neither accidental, nor substantial, but hypostatic" (543). In the last analysis, it finds "its proper metaphysical expression [...] by analogy with the mystery of the incarnate Word" (550).

On his part, Étienne Gilson observed that Augustine's thought was indeterminate on this point, and while denying that the bishop of Hippo was interested in this problem, Gilson affirmed that he had been brought by his Christianity to correct the formulation he inherited from Plato.[5]

We willingly acknowledge with Père Couturier that Augustine's doctrine is neither quite that of Plato nor that of Aristotle. Can we then conclude that he elaborated a personal theory? One would first have to establish that he had only these two classical theses to choose between, which is not the case. The problem had not ceased to be taken up throughout antiquity,[6] and it had already been resolved in an original way by Neoplatonism. One can in effect say that there exists a specifically Neoplatonic doctrine of the relations of soul and body whose novelty and importance do not seem to have been sufficiently noticed. In our view, it is quite simply this doctrine in its broad terms that Saint Augustine took up and made his own.

The following pages have as their aim to complete the very pertinent remarks of Père Couturier by shedding light on the essentially Neoplatonic character of Augustinian thought on this point and at the same time to propose a slightly different interpretation of certain texts in light of this observation.

I

The basic text is provided by *Letter* 137, which Augustine addressed to Volusianus. One recalls that in this letter Augustine reviews some traditional themes of the anti-Christian polemic regarding which the pagan Volusianus (*Letter* 135) and Marcellinus (*Letter* 136) had experienced the need to have recourse to his insights: the virgin birth of Christ, the delay of the Incarnation, the scandal of a God made man, etc.

To the Christian dogma of the Incarnation the pagans objected, among other things, that it was impossible for God to unite Himself to a human nature. In the passage we propose to examine (*Letter* 137.11), Augustine seeks to show there is nothing improbable in that and opposes to this occurrence that has only happened once another that is even more mysterious and that nonetheless takes place every day: the union in man of the soul and the body.[7] It is easier to conceive, Augustine says, the union of two spiritual substances than the union of a spiritual substance and a corporeal substance.[8] It is just that we end up finding banal the realities that habit has rendered familiar to us, whereas if we consented to examine them closely they would seem to us astonishing.[9]

Augustine's whole effort will consist in showing that if in man the soul and the body are united to form

one person, all the more can one admit as possible the case of Christ, where two incorporeal substances, the divine Word and the soul, are united.[10] It is true that the union of soul and body is something that we can experience in ourselves, whereas we are obliged to believe that a union of divinity and humanity has taken place in Christ.[11] But if we did not have this experiential knowledge of the human composite, would we not a *priori* consider the combination of two incorporeal substances to be more probable than the combination of an incorporeal and a corporeal substance?[12]

The author, one sees, does not seek to elaborate a new theory of man on the model of the Incarnation; he simply defends the latter's possibility by appealing to a doctrine of the union of the soul and the body that he presupposes his adversary admits. The whole reasoning process becomes unintelligible if one maintains that Augustine utilizes a conception of the human composite that is itself inspired by Christian faith. We would have there a veritable vicious circle. Such is the general sense of the paragraph.

II

Now, what is this mode of the union of soul and body to which he alludes? The few lines that describe it appear to us revealing in the highest degree. They reproduce down to the details a line of argument known from elsewhere and whose origin we can determine in a fairly precise way. For greater clarity, let us place the essential passages in parallel columns without delay:

Aug., *Letter* 137.11	Nemesius, *De nat. hom.*	Priscianus, *Solut.*
In illa ergo persona **mixtura** est **animae** et **corporis,** in hac persona **mixtura** est Dei et hominis, si tamen recedat auditor a consuetudine corporum, *quo solent duo liquores ita misceri, ut neutrum servet integ-ritatem suam,* quamquam et in ipsis corporibus, *aeri* **lux incorrupta misceatur.** Ergo persona hominis **mixtura** est **animae** et **corporis,** persona autem Christi **mixtura** est Dei et hominis... verum tamen *duarum rerum* **incorporearum commixtio** facilius credi debuit quam unius incorporeae et quam *unius incorporeae et alterius corporeae.*[13]	'ν≤Υκη γfρ א νΙσθαι τ—ν ψυχ—ν κα τΠσΙμα ... א κεκρ♥σθαι Ιφο νον κα ⇔δωρ...κα ≠κρ♥σιφ δ το◊ ο νου κα το◊ ⇔δατοφ 'μφ®τερα συν— διαφθε ρει.. Ο⇐τε γfρ ⇔δωρ στ καθαρΠν τΠ κρ♥μα, ο⇐τε ο νοφ... κα νο◊ται τ⅂ ◆ ερι τΠ φΙφ, 'συγχ∨τωφ /μα α∧τ⅂ κεχυμ νον.[14]	Si enim **corrupta** sint unita, unam perficiunt substantiam; si vero sal-vari possunt, etsi fortassis nos lateat, non videtur connaturaliter in unam substantiam uniri, *sicut mixtum ex vino et aqua...* Incorporales enim essen-tiae corporibus uniuntur et manent inconfusae... **Lux vero unitur** quidem **aeri,** sicut ea quae sunt *concorrupta,* et incon-fusa manet ad eum... **incorporalia** igitur et **corporibus** et per eandem analogian **incorporalibus aliis** unita et **commisceri** possunt et segregari, ac per hoc **mixtura** corporaliter non facta, sed secundum compassionem et similitudinem ad illud inclinat.[15]

Short as it is, the passage from *Letter* 137 gives rise to a certain number of precise parallels with the other two. First, there are similarities in the vocabulary in the three texts that do not appear due to mere coincidence. *Mixtura, misceri, commixtio, servare integritatem, corrupta, incorrupta,* as well as further on, *unire quodam modo, coaptari, excepta concretione,* are, as it happens, veritable key notions and almost technical terms.

More striking yet are the two examples that are used. That of the light and air is the same and is expressed by an identical phrase in all three cases.[16] In what concerns the mixture of the two liquids one notes the double precision made by Nemesius and Priscian: on the one hand, they specify the nature of the substances, water and wine; and on the other hand, after affirming that there was corruption of one and the other, they add that this corruption is only apparent. Although this cannot be perceived, the two liquids are in reality only juxtaposed. The proof is that they can be separated anew with the help of a sponge soaked

with oil. Augustine follows the commonly accepted doctrine that every liquid entering into composition loses its own nature and is transformed into a new homogeneous substance. Oil, however, was considered an exception to the rule.[17] In other cases, such as mead or wine, there were divergent views, as Proclus informs us.[18] These divergences are of little consequence, however. The example is the same and the same conclusions are always drawn. Perhaps Augustine was aware that the particular case of water and wine was ambiguous.

In general the doctrine is not only analogous, but rigorously identical. It concerns, at the start at least, a polemic aimed at Stoicism, as Nemesius says explicitly[19] and as the terms themselves of the debate indicate: κρ♥σιφ, παρ≤θεσιφ, ’λλο ωσιφ. We know that in favor of the soul’s corporeality the Stoics advanced that no bond was possible between a corporeal and an incorporeal substance.[20] Now, one needs to acknowledge that between the soul and the body there exists a certain communication. Experience shows us that they act upon each other: the soul gives life to the body; when the soul experiences a feeling of shame or when it is afraid, the body turns red or pale as the case may be; inversely the soul experiences repercussions of the bodily passions, such as pain.[21] If the body is viewed as a mere garment or as the instrument of the soul, as Plato invites us to do, one has a hard time explaining this reciprocal influence. The garment and the one who wears it do not form a single being;[22] or, as Plotinus himself says: “Now from the soul using the body as an instrument, it does not follow that the soul must share the body’s experiences: a man does not himself feel all the experiences of the tools with which he is working.”[23]

The hypothesis of a simple juxtaposition (παρ≤θεσιφ) must thus be abandoned. There remains the possibility of a mixture (κρ♥σιφ). Now, every mixture implies the transformation of substances and a new substance, different from the first two, and hence the disappearance of these and their properties, as we have seen. There will no longer be either soul or body, but a third substance, born of the fusion of the two.

To overcome these difficulties, it has to be shown that the Stoic enumeration of the modes of union was not exhaustive. It is not true that every νωσιφ necessarily entails an ’λλο ωσιφ.[24] Between juxtaposition and mixture properly speaking, there is room for a union of a new type,[25] that is, a union without confusion (♦μικτοφ, ’sνγχυτοφ, νωσιφ) that allows each substance to subsist integrally. This is a union in the full sense of the term, a sort of intermediary between the other two, which, like κρ♥σιφ, closely joins the two substances to the point of making one being of them, but which, like παρ≤θεσιφ, does not involve their annihilation. This allows Plotinus to affirm, without contradicting himself, that the “we” (τΠ ≠με φ) at times designates only the soul, at other times the composite.[26] While leaving the soul its primacy and letting it define “the true man,”[27] he himself recognizes that the “animal” or what he also calls “the whole substance of man”[28] is a mixture (μικτ®ν) of superior and inferior elements closely united in such a way that when the body suffers, we can say that it is we who suffer.[29]

This original mode of union is precisely what is proper to spiritual substances,[30] whether they unite with one another, or they are joined to bodies.[31] To understand it, one needs to abstract from what the senses tell us,[32] but it is not quite without analogy in the domain of the body, as one sees in the example of light and air that unite without being corrupted. That is why the term illumination is particularly apt to designate and symbolize this presence of the soul to the body. We should not see in this only a reality of an epistemological order. We find it in contexts that have nothing to do with a theory of knowledge.[33] But since this action of the soul has the effect of imprinting its reflection in bodies and thus, in various degrees, rendering matter intelligible, it is also not without some relation to intellectual illumination.

III

Such, in summary description, is the precise doctrine to which *Letter* 137 alludes. Is it possible to identify its immediate source?

Fortunately, Nemesius and Priscian, who without question depend on a common source,[34] took pains to indicate the work that inspired them, the *Quaestiones commixtae* of Porphyry. Nemesius says so explicitly in the course of his exposition,[35] and the same title is found among those where, in the introduction to the *Solutiones,* Priscian tells us he drew his doctrine. One will recall that the question of the relations of soul and body interested Porphyry greatly. He himself informs us that he discussed the matter for three days running with Plotinus, to the despair of his fellow disciple Thaumasius, who would have preferred a continuous exposition from the master.[36]

One notes as well that, in part at least, this is the doctrine that Nemesius attributes to Ammonius Saccas, Plotinus’s teacher.[37] Von Arnim has demonstrated that the bishop of Emesa took the passage he cites here from Porphyry.[38]

The passage in *Letter* 137 that follows immediately after the one we have analyzed confirms this

hypothesis of a borrowing from pagan philosophy. Augustine alludes to the philosophers who have said things that are true and useful, although often mixed with error, and who, in their desire for divinity, were mistaken in wanting to approach God with pride instead of doing so humbly as the Incarnation teaches us.[39] It is not impossible that these many truths (*multa vera*) attributed to the pagans refer precisely to the doctrine of the soul he has just set forth. It would also be advantageous to compare these texts with a passage in *The City of God*[40] where the ideas of *Letter* 137 are taken up again, often in the same terms. This time Augustine is addressing Porphyry by name.

It is certain that, as far as one can judge, the doctrine in question goes back to the third century of our era.[41] This is evidenced by several traits that one would seek in vain to find in Plato and that constitute one of the clearest characteristics of what could be considered a specifically Neoplatonic theory of the soul. The unity of the human composite in particular is affirmed with a vigor unknown in Plato's dialogues. To be sure, the soul and the body are always presented as two complete substances and in that the Neoplatonists are resolutely opposed to the Aristotelian doctrine of substantial co-principles. But one can no longer affirm that their union is purely accidental. The manner in which it is explained may seem subtle; the least one can say is that it bears witness to a real and original effort to resolve one of the thorniest problems in psychology.

IV

If these remarks are valid, they shed new light on the tenor of the argument of *Letter* 137. It is a good deal subtler than it appeared at first view. Augustine is not content to combat a philosophic reasoning directed against the dogma of the Incarnation by another philosophic reasoning of his own devising; he takes his adversary's own argument to turn it against him. He shows that in reality the Incarnation is not only not repugnant to reason but that it is fully in conformity with the very doctrine in whose name it is attacked since it presents the union of two incorporeal substances according to the mode favored with particular insistence by the Neoplatonists themselves.[42]

It is for this reason, no doubt, that Augustine highlights the fact that the divine Word unites itself to another spiritual substance, the human soul. In fact, the Word unites itself to a complete human nature, which is to say, composed of a soul and a body, as Augustine himself says later in the letter.[43] But he did not at first back away from the nudge in the right direction that makes his reasoning process more efficacious.

This way of responding to an adversary by reasoning from his own principles is nonetheless familiar to Augustine. He has recourse to the same procedure regarding the dogma of the resurrection of the body which, as is well known, was especially repugnant to the pagan philosophers. Augustine never fails, every time the question arises, to remind them that they themselves teach astral immortality, that is to say, an immortality in which the body also has a part.[44] We have there a truly typical illustration of the patristic commonplace that Christians must take up philosophy in order to be able to combat the enemies of Christianity with their own arms.[45]

Wherein, then, resides Augustine's originality? Is it simply in the astuteness that, as an able polemicist, he displays here? Must one believe that, contrary to what one could infer from the remarks of Père Couturier, his theory of the soul owes nothing to the idea he had of the Incarnation? That would be to misunderstand a profound aspect of Augustinian thought. The truth is that the two ideas support one another.

It does not seem, at least in what concerns the passages we have studied, that Augustine has essentially modified the doctrine that he borrowed from the enemies of Christianity and used to confound them. To be sure, the expression *una persona*—already employed by Tertullian[46] and taken up again by Augustine two centuries later—is very Latin, but it only says in more precise terms what the Greek already affirmed in its own way. For all that, it does not follow that the dogma of the Incarnation was of no use to him. Of course, Augustine ascends from the unity of the human composite to the union of the two natures in the person of Christ. But once we have arrived at the term of the ascent, we have the benefit of a new vantage point: the light of the higher shines on the lower. Thanks to his reference to the *analogum princeps,* the doctrine of the soul and body acquires a dignity and a degree of certitude that it did not previously have. Such is the divine wisdom that associates the most ordinary reality to exceptional occurrences, and so elevates the first while rendering the second more accessible to us: "But now a mediator has appeared between God and men so that, uniting both natures in the unity of his person, he may raise up the ordinary to the extraordinary and temper the extraordinary to the ordinary."[47]

NOTES

1 Charles Couturier, S.J., "La structure métaphysique de l'homme d'après saint Augustin," *Augustinus*

Magister I (Paris), 543-50. Editor's Note: the International Augustinian Congress took place in Paris from September 21 to 24, 1954, on the occasion of the sixteenth centenary of the birth of Saint Augustine.

2 Editor's Note: "Saint Augustine and the Neoplatonic Doctrine of the Soul: Letter 137.11" originally appeared as "Saint Augustin et la doctrine néoplatonicienne de l'âme (Ep. 137, 11)" in *Augustinus Magister* III (1955), 371-80. Special thanks are owed to Dr. Marc A. LePain for his translation of this first article written by Ernest Fortin.

3 *De moribus* 1.27.52.

4 *De ordine* II.11.31. See the other references that Couturier gives (op. cit., 543).

5 "It is sometimes surprising that he did not discuss or even notice the metaphysical difficulties involved in such a definition (i.e., the Platonic definition); but this is because the abstract problem of the metaphysical structure of man seemed pointless to him." Etienne Gilson, *Introduction à l'étude de saint Augustin,* 3rd ed. (Paris: J. Vrin, 1949), 58. "Augustine thus inherited a Platonic definition of man; on the other hand, his Christianity required him to maintain firmly the unity of the human composite made up of a soul and a body; hence one can often see that his thinking is undetermined, especially when he tries to force Plato's definition into expressing a Christian notion of man." Gilson, *Introduction,* 58, n. 2.

6 Varro, *De philosophia,* according to Augustine, *De civitate Dei* XIX.3: "What is man: the soul alone...the body alone...or the union of the two?" "Of these three options," St. Augustine adds, "Varro chose the third." In *De moribus* I.4, where the same problem is discussed, Augustine lets it be known that a solution exists, but he does not want to pursue the matter for lack of time: *difficile est istam controversiam diiudicare; aut si ratione facile, ratione longum est* ("for it is difficult to adjudicate this controversy of ours: if it is easy by way of reason, it is long by way of discussion"). Cf. also Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.1.5.1 et passim; Nemesius, *De natura hominis* (*On the Nature of Man*): "Plato will not admit that an animal is a being composed of a soul and a body, but a soul that uses a body and that the body is in some way a garment. But this too has its difficulties" (*Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa,* The Library of Christian Classics, vol. 4, ed. William Teller [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955], 372).

7 Augustine, *ep*. 137.11: *Sic autem quidam reddi sibi rationem flagitant, quomodo deus homini permixtus sit, ut una fieret persona Christi, cum hoc semel fieri oportuerit, quasi rationem ipsi reddant de re, quae cotidie fit, quo modo misceatur anima corpori, ut una persona fiat hominis*. ("Thus, however, certain people demand that an account be given to them of how God was mingled with man to become the one person of Christ—even though it was proper that this happen but once—as if they could give an account of something that happens daily: how the soul is mingled with the body to become the one person of a man.")

8 Ibid.: *Verum tamen duarum rerum incorporearum commixtio facilius credi debuit, quam unius incorporeae et alterius corporeae.* ("Nevertheless, the commingling of two incorporeal realities should be more readily believed than that of one incorporeal reality and one corporeal.")

9 Ibid.: *Denique quam multa usitata calcantur, quae considerata stupentur*. ("Lastly, how many are the everyday things which are spurned that, when considered, are stupendous.")

10 Ibid. 137.10: *Multo magis incorporeum est Verbum dei ac per hoc Verbi dei et animae credibilior debuit esse permixtio."* ("By much more is the Word of God incorporeal, and it is for this reason that the thorough mingling of the Word of God and the soul should be more believable.")

11 Ibid. 137.11: *Sed hoc in nobis ipsis experimur, illud in Christo credere iubemur*. ("But we experience the latter in our very selves; the former we have been told to believe in Christ.")

12 Ibid.: *Si autem utrumque nobis pariter inexpertum credendum praeciperetur, quid horum citius crederemus*? ("But if it were decreed that we should believe both things—which are equally unfamiliar to us—which of these would we believe more quickly?")

13 "Therefore, in the former person there is a **mingling** of **soul** and **body;** in the latter a **mingling** of God and man, if only the listener move past that tendency of bodies *in which two fluids are usually mixed in such a way that neither retains its integrity*, although in bodies themselves **light is mingled with air without being** corrupted. Therefore, the person of man is the **mingling** of **soul** and body, but the person of Christ is the

mingling of God and man... Nevertheless, the **commingling** *of two incorporeal realities* should be more readily believed than that of *one incorporeal reality and one corporeal*" (ibid.).

14 "Our next subject of enquiry concerns the manner of **union** between **soul** and body ... The *mixing of wine and water* destroys the nature of both together. The **mixture** is neither clean water, nor is it wine... As the presence of the sun transforms the **air** into **light...** at once maintaining them distinct and yet melting them together" (*On the Nature of Man*, 293, 294, and 298).

15 "For if **corrupted realities** are united, they make one substance; but if they can be preserved—even though may be hidden from us—it does not seem they are co-naturally united into one substance, as a *mixture from wine and water*... For incorporeal essences are united to bodies and remain unconfused... **Light, however, is united to air** (as things which are **corrupted together**) and remains unconfused from it... Therefore, **incorporeal realities** can be commingled with and separated from **bodies** and, by this same analogy, united with other **incorporeal realities;** and because of this, a **mingling** does not occur bodily but inclines to it by way of sympathy and likeness" (Priscianus Lydus, *Solutiones ad Chosroem,* ed. Ingram Bywater [Berlin: Reimer, 1885], 51). The text of Priscian is an ancient translation of a Greek original.

16 See also Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.3.22.2, where the light is said to be present in the air yet not present, penetrating everywhere but not mixed in. Cf. Chalcidius, *In Timaeum* 224: *Proprium est hoc eius naturae quod est sine corpore, ut lucis, quae corpus aereum penetrat* ("This is proper to its nature: that it is without a body, like that of the light, which penetrates *the* airy body"), and Psellos, *De omn. doct.* 34.

17 Arnobius, *Adversus nationes* II.7: *Quid sit quod humores universi unum corpus efficient mixtione, solum oleum respuat immersionem in se pati, sed in suam naturam impenetrabile semper perspicue colligatur?* ("Why is it that all fluids in a mixture make one body, and oil alone refuses to allow immersion [of other liquids] into it but is always conspicuously bound up in its own nature, impenetrable?")

18 See Proclus, *In Timaeum* 218. Porphyry, like Augustine, favored the idea of a complete mixture. The same example is already to be found in Alexander of Aphrodisias, likewise on the subject of the union of the soul and the body: "Moreover, if the soul spreads throughout the body and mixes with it, the animal will no longer have either soul or body, but will be something else, a composite of two substances, corrupted and transformed, like mead (μελ κρατον)." See also the example of water and wine (ο ν®μελι) that form a perfectly homogeneous mixture *(De anima* 116.5). See Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.7.8(bis).6: "Now, if in the admixing of bodies neither constituent can retain its efficacy, the soul too could no longer be effective within the bodies; it could but be latent; it will have lost that by which it is soul, just as in an admixture of sweet and bitter the sweet disappears" *(The Six Enneads,* trans. Stephen MacKenna and B.S. Page [Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1952], 196). See also Chalcidius, *In Timaeum* 224: *Proprium vero est hoc eius naturae... ut dulcedinis quae pervadit melleum corpus"* ("It is, however, proper to this its nature... as that of the sweetness which pervades a honeyed body"). The example of wine was taken from everyday experience. The ancients, as a matter of principle, did not drink wine pure, something they saw as worthy of the barbarians. Seawater was added to certain Greek wines.

19 See Nemesius, *On the Nature of Man,* 265; and see also Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.7.8 (bis).

20 See Cleanthes, according to Tertullian, *De anima* 5.5: *corporalium et incorporalium passiones inter se non communicare* ("The passions of corporeal and incorporeal beings do not share anything"); Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De anima* 117.9: 'λλf κα ∠ λ®γοφ ψευδ—φ∠λ ψων ' σ⌊ματον μ—συμπ≤σχει ⌈στε μ—ε ναι 'σ⌊ματον τ—ν ψυχ—ν; Severus, a second century Platonist, according to Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* XIII.17; Plotinus, *Enneads* I.1.3.12: σ⌊μα μ ν γfρ σ⌊ματι, ◆ λλω μεταδ⌊σει τ⌊ν ατο◇, σ⌊μα δ ψυχ⊆ π⌊φ ("Body may communicate qualities or conditions to another body: but—body to soul?" [*Six Enneads,* 2]); Nemesius, *On the Nature of Man:* ο⇑δ ν 'σ⌊ματον συμπ≤σχει σ⌊ματι, 'λλf σ⌊μα σ⌊ματι ("an incorporeal thing cannot be affected by what happens to a body, or vice versa, but one body is affected by what happens to another body" *[On the Nature of Man,* 266]). Cf. Lucretius, *De rerum natura* III.168ff.

21 See Nemesius, *On the Nature of Man,* 266; and see Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.1.5.

22 Nemesius, *On the Nature of Man,* 295.

23 Plotinus, *Enneads* I.1.3.3.

24 Nemesius: π δ τ⌊ν νοητ⌊ν νωσιφ μ ν γ νεται ’λλο ωσιφ δ ο∧ παρακολουθε κα ‘συγχντωφ νωται τ⌉ σ⌊ματι ≠ ψυχ≈ (“In the case of intelligibles, on the other hand, union takes place, and yet no change in them results ... Surely, then, the soul suffers no change, as the result of union with body” [*On the Nature of Man,* 295]).

25 Nemesius: καιν®τεροφ ο®τοφ ∠ τρ®ποφ τ—φ κρ≤σεωφ | ν⌊σεωφ (“This manner of mingling or union is something quite new” [*On the Nature of Man,* 295]).

26 See Plotinus, *Enneads* I.1.10.5.

27 Plotinus, *Enneads* I.1.7.20 and I.1.10.7.

28 Plotinus, *Enneads* I.1.7.8.

29 Plotinus, *Enneads* I.1.10.3. See Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De anima* 117.11: “The incorporeal element in man does not suffer in the same manner as a separated being, as we say that two friends suffer together; what suffers is the composite, the living being formed of a soul and a body.” See Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* III.16.25: *nam et ipse corporis dolor in quolibet animante magna et mirabilis animae vis est, qua illam compagem ineffabili permixtione vitaliter continet, et in quamdam sui moduli redigit unitatem, cum non indifferenter, sed, ut ita dicam, indignanter patitur corrumpi atque dissolvi*. (“For even bodily pain itself in any living being is a great and wonderful power of the soul which, through a thorough mixing beyond words, holds this binding together so as to endow it with life and confers upon it, in its own small way, a certain unity. This happens anytime it endures being harmed or destroyed not with indifference, if I may put it this way, but with indignation.”) See also Augustine, *De civitate Dei* XIX. 12.

30 Nemesius: λεγε γ*f*ρ (i.e., Ammonius) τ*f* νοητ*f* τοιαντην χειν φνσιν (“He said that it is the nature of intelligibles” [*On the Nature of Man*, 295]). Cf. Chalcidius, *In Timaeum* 224: “It is proper of its nature that it is without a body”; and Priscian, *Solutiones* 51: “This is the nature of incorporeal beings.”

31 Priscian, ibid.: *Incorporalia igitur et corporibus et per eandem analogian incorporalibus aliis unita et commisceri possunt*... (“Therefore, incorporeal realities can be commingled with bodies and, by this same analogy, united with other incorporeal realities”).

32 Augustine, *ep*. 137.11: *Si tamen recedat auditor a consuetudine corporum* (“if only the listener move past the tendency of bodies”).

33 See Plotinus, *Enneads* I.1.10.11; I.12.12.27; et passim.

34 See H. von Arnim, “Quelle der Überlieferung über Ammonius Sakkas,” in *Rhein. Museum* 42 (1887), 276ff.

35 See Nemesius, *On the Nature of Man*, 301.

36 Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 13. At least this is the meaning we give to Porphyry’s question: π⌊φ ≠ ψυξ—σννεστι τ⌉ σωματι; It is possible, nonetheless, that the problem under discussion was the fall of the soul (how is it that the soul is united to the body?) and not the problem of the mode of union. See A.-J. Festugière, *La révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste*, III (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1953), 66, and n. 4.

37 See Nemesius, *On the Nature of Man*, 301.

38 See H. von Arnim, “Quelle der Überlieferung über Ammonius Sakkas,” in *Rhein. Museum* 42 (1887), 276ff.

39 Augustine, *ep*. 137.12.

40 See Augustine, *De civitate Dei* X.29. Already in *De fide et symbolo* IV.10 Saint Augustine replied in like fashion to the pagan critique of the Incarnation: *Nec nobis fidem istam minuat cogitatio muliebrium viscerum, ut propterea recusanda videatur talis domini nostri generatio, quod eam sordidi sordidam putant... Debent igitur intueri, qui hoc putant, solis huius radios... per cloacarum fetores et quaeque horribilia usquequaque diffundi et in his operari secundum naturam suam nec tamen inde aliqua contaminatione sordescere, cum visibilis lux visibilibus sordibus sit natura coniunctior: quanto minus igitur poterat pollui verbum Dei non corporeum neque visibile de*

femineo corpore, ubi humanam carnem suscepit cum anima et spiritu, quibus intervenientibus habitat maiestas verbi ab humani corporis fragilitate secretius! Unde manifestum est nullo modo potuisse verbum Dei maculari humano corpore, quo nec ipsa anima humana maculata est. ("Nor should the thought of a female womb weaken our faith, so that on account of this it seems that the birth of our Lord, which the sordid consider sordid, is the sort of thing we should recoil from [...] Those who believe this should therefore consider the rays of this [earthly] sun [...] which are diffused throughout the very stench of sewers and other awful places, and in these places they act according to their nature yet without suffering any contamination as a result, since by its nature visible light is more closely related to visible filth. How much less, then, could the Word of God, which is neither corporeal nor visible, be polluted through a female body when He took on human flesh with a soul and spirit: the majesty of the Word dwells in the midst of these things, quite hidden from the frailty of a human body. Hence it is obvious that the Word of God could in no way be tainted by a human body, for the human soul itself is not tainted [in this way].")

41 This is what we are led to assume, apart from the traces we have cited in authors of the time, by the fact that Plotinus devotes to this doctrine a schematic exposition in one of his first treatises and the most scholarly one he wrote (*Enneads* IV.7.8 [bis]). One can think that he is merely summarizing a doctrine already accepted in the school, and probably that of his teacher Ammonius, to whom Nemesius attributes it (*On the Nature of Man,* 301).

42 It is to be noted that Nemesius shows the same capacity (cf. *On the Nature of Man*, 300). The same doctrine is developed, very likely under the influence of *Letter* 137, by Eucherius in a passage preserved by Claudianus Mamertus in *De statu animae* (135). It is also taken up in the *Quicumque vult*, also known as the Athanasian Creed: *Unus omnino, non confusione substantiae, sed unitate personae. Nam sicut anima rationalis et caro unus est homo, ita Deus et homo unus est Christus*. ("One altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person. For as the rational soul and flesh is one man, so too is God and man one Christ.")

43 Augustine, *ep*. 137.12: *ut ei sic coaptaretur homo totus* ("so that the whole man is conjoined to Him thus"). See *De fide et symbolo* IV.8 where, against the Apollinarians this time, Augustine insists on the fact that the Word also assumed a human spirit, that is to say, the higher part of the soul: *ut totum hominem credat a verbo dei esse susceptum, id est corpus, anima, spiritum* ("in order for him to believe that the whole man was taken up by the Word of God").

44 See Augustine, *De civitate Dei* X.29; XIII.16; and *Sermon* 241.

45 See, for example, Sidonius Appollinaris, *ep*. 9.9.

46 See Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean* 27. On the use of the phrase *una persona* in Saint Augustine, see Tarcisius von Bavel, *Recherches sur la christologie de saint Augustin* (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1954), 13ff.

47 Augustine, *ep*. 137.9. We will return to this question and its repercussions in a work in preparation on the doctrines of the soul in Late Antiquity. (Editor's Note: The work in question is Fortin's doctoral dissertation, presented in 1955 and later published as *Christianisme et culture philosophique au cinquième siècle: la querelle de l'âme humaine en Occident* [Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1959]. It has been translated into English by Dr. James Colbert and will most likely be published under the title, *Christianity and Philosophical Culture in the Fifth Century*.)

6

THE CITY OF GOD

Written at intermittent intervals between 413 and 427, the *City of God* is Augustine's longest and most comprehensive work.[1] It is also one of the foundational books of patristic literature. Its unique achievement is to have clarified Christianity's ambiguous relationship to the temporal order and to have established, in opposition to some of the most influential Christian writers of the Constantinian era, its radical transcendence vis-à-vis the Roman Empire and, indeed, all possible regimes or political dispensations. Implied in Augustine's position on this issue is a rejection of the classical notion of the city or its equivalents as self-sufficient totalities capable of fulfilling all of one's basic needs and aspirations. Without renouncing their citizenship in the temporal society to which they belong, Christians form part of a universal, albeit invisible, society in which alone salvation can be attained. In order to defend his thesis, Augustine was forced to touch upon virtually every important aspect of Christian life and thought. This accounts for the encyclopedic character of the *City of God*, which frequently delves into matters that go well beyond the historical circumstances that dictated its composition.

The title of the work is taken from Psalm 87:3 (Vg. 86:3): "Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God," and is intended as an ironic reply to the slanderous accusations that were being leveled at Christianity by its pagan detractors. The twenty-two books that it comprises fall into two main parts. Books 1-10 are a refutation of the "false teachings" (*vanitates*) of the pagans: first, those who worship the pagan gods for the sake of happiness in this life or the aggrandizement of the Roman Empire (bks. 1-5); and secondly, those who worship the same gods for the sake of happiness in the afterlife or the good of the soul (bks. 6-10). In accordance with a classification that Augustine inherits from Varro, the different forms taken by pagan religion are dealt with in ascending order of importance under three headings: "mythical theology," or the theology of the poets; "civil theology," or the official theology of the city; and "natural theology," or the theology of the philosophers. Books 11-22 are a "demonstration and defense" of the truth of the Christian faith and are presented as the positive counterpart of the negative critique carried out in the first ten books.[2] This section is divided into three parts dealing respectively with the origin, the development, and the end of the two cities into which Augustine divides all of humanity: the "city of God," symbolized by Jerusalem, and the "earthly city," symbolized by Babylon and occasionally called the "city of the devil" (*civ. Dei* XVII.20.2, 21.1). Augustine's tripartite scheme is inspired by the Bible and corresponds to what now often goes under the name of "salvation history." It should be noted that the two cities in question are not empirical entities, comparable to cities in the ordinary sense and identifiable by their geographical boundaries. They are cities in a mystical sense—*mystice* (XV.1.1). Citizenship in one or the other is determined, not by the accidents of one's birth, parental lineage, or place of residence, but by the object of one's love or the end to which all of one's actions are subordinated: in one case, "the love of God to the contempt of oneself"; in the other case, "the love of oneself to the contempt of God" (XIV.28).

The sheer bulk of the *City of God* and the subtlety of its analyses are such as to render futile any attempt to condense the whole of its teaching into a few paragraphs. The following remarks focus on themes that are more proper to Augustine, as distinguished from other ancient Christian writers, or more proper to the *City of God*, as distinguished from themes that receive a fuller treatment elsewhere in the vast Augustinian corpus, such as the Trinity, the Incarnation, creation and divine governance, nature and grace, free will and predestination, the origin of evil, marriage and virginity, and a host of other critical issues, including the major heresies or schisms of Augustine's day: Manicheism, Donatism, and Pelagianism.

THE CRITIQUE OF PAGAN THOUGHT

The occasion that prompted Augustine to undertake this "huge and arduous task" (*civ. Dei* praef.) is the sack of Rome at the hands of Alaric and the Goths in August 410. Although the event did little to disrupt the life of the empire—the invaders withdrew after three days—it made a deep impression on people's

imaginations and revealed more clearly than ever before Rome's vulnerability in the face of the threat posed to its security by hordes of marauding barbarians on its borders. Christianity was promptly blamed for the disaster by its adversaries, and the old charge that it was inimical to the wellbeing of the empire gained new currency among the pagan population. Rome, so the argument went, owed its greatness to the favor of its gods. By forsaking these gods it had incurred their wrath and deprived itself of their protection. The present calamity was an act of revenge on their part, a judgment of Jove.

Thus crudely stated, the argument was not likely to carry much weight with the pagan elite, most of whom had long ceased to take the gods of Roman mythology seriously, clinging to them only for aesthetic or purely political reasons. Varro and the illustrious pontiff Scaevola were of the opinion that the common people ought to be "lied to" in matters of religion (IV.27 and 31). Seneca "feigned" respect for the rites of civil theology, for which at heart he had no regard (VI.10.3). "Cicero the augur laughs at auguries" (IV.30). All four of them were thrust into the awkward position of having to dissemble, worshiping what they decried and publicly engaging in practices they secretly abhorred. Besides, it could easily be shown that Rome had suffered innumerable disasters in the course of its long and turbulent history. Since most of these evils antedated the rise of Christianity, they could not plausibly be laid at its door.

The real issue lay elsewhere, in the conviction that the spread of Christian morality had brought about a decline in public spiritedness and could be held at least indirectly responsible for the deteriorating fortunes of the empire. By enlisting people in the service of a "higher and nobler country,"[3] Christianity divided the city and undermined the unconditional claim that it makes on the allegiance of its citizens. Worse still, many of its specific teachings appeared to be in direct conflict with the sacred duties of citizenship. Its doctrine of the universal brotherhood of human beings, its precept enjoining the love of one's enemies, and the high esteem in which it held the virtues of meekness and patience (Col. 3:12) all tended to rob the city of its strongest defense against external foes. Christians, it was said, were better at praying for their rulers than at fighting for them. In the minds of Augustine's contemporaries, the danger was far from illusory. Faced with the seemingly impossible task of reconciling Christianity with loyalty to one's country, some of Augustine's close friends were reluctant to accept baptism even once they had been instructed in the faith.[4]

Augustine's reply to these concerns consists in saying that Christianity does not destroy patriotism, a civic virtue, but reinforces it by elevating it to the rank of religious obligation. The Old Testament prophets and the New Testament writers alike command obedience to civil authority and the laws of one's country. Anyone who violates these laws "resists God's ordinance and... incurs his wrath" (Rom. 13:2), a text to which Augustine constantly refers in this connection. Such being the case, one cannot allege the service of God as a reason for refusing submission to one's temporal rulers or shirking one's public responsibilities. Any depreciation of the fatherland, if there be any, is amply compensated for by the fact that Christianity expects and usually obtains from its followers a higher degree of compliance with the demands of morality and virtue.

Unlike Judaism, Christianity first comes to sight as a faith or a "saving doctrine" (Titus 1:9), rather than as a divinely revealed law governing all of one's actions and opinions and destined to replace the human laws under which people commonly live. In temporal matters it does not impose a way of life of its own, different from that of the rest of the city, and is thus compatible with any decent regime. Its universality is such that it can accommodate itself to the most diverse customs and practices (*civ. Dei* XIX.17). The only practices to which it is opposed are the ones that reason itself denounces as immoral. By censuring these practices, it actually serves the best interests of the city. Defective as it may be, civil society is still the greatest good of its kind that human beings possess (XV.4). Its aim is or should be earthly peace. In the pursuit of that goal Christians and non-Christians can be united and live together as citizens of the same city (XIX.17).

Nor is it fair to say that Christianity breeds contempt for military valor. The New Testament does not order soldiers to surrender their arms but rather commends them for their righteousness. The injunction to requite evil with good concerns not so much external actions as the spirit in which these actions are to be performed. It seeks to insure that war, if it must be waged, will be carried out with a benevolent design and without undue harshness. In some instances peace and the correction of wrongdoers are more readily achieved by forgiveness than by castigation, whereas in other instances allowing crimes to go unpunished would only confirm the wicked in their evil ways by giving free rein to injustice. What Christianity reproves is not war itself but the evils of war, such as the love of violence, revengeful cruelty, fierce and implacable hatreds, wild resistance, and the lust for power. By yielding to these evils, human beings forfeit a good that is far more precious than any of the earthly possessions that an enemy could wrest from them. Instead of increasing the number of the good, they merely add themselves to the number of the wicked.[5] War is

therefore permissible, but only when undertaken out of necessity and for the sake of peace. The decision to wage such a war rests with the ruler, to whom is entrusted the care of the community as a whole. As for the simple soldier, his duty is to obey orders. He himself is not answerable for the crimes that may be committed in cases where it is not clear whether the orders are just or unjust.

The true cause of the breakdown of the Roman polity was not Christianity but Rome's failure to live up to its own most noble ideals. This Augustine will try to show from the pagan authors themselves and, most notably, from Cicero's acute diagnosis of the shortcomings of Roman public life in books 1-3 of *De re publica*. Reacting against a trend set in motion by R.W. and A.J. Carlyle, who attributed to Augustine the notion that political rule has as its sole function the repression of evil and is thus essentially penal and remedial in character,[6] recent Augustinian scholarship has tended to stress its natural character.[7] Accordingly, civil society would be rooted in nature as such, rather than in sinful nature, and would have existed even if the Fall had not occurred, although without the element of coercion that is now inseparable from it. Its cornerstone is justice, which is desirable for its own sake and not simply as a matter of necessity or convenience. Quoting Cicero with approval, Augustine defines the city or commonwealth (*res publica*) as "a group of rational beings bound together by a common acknowledgment of right and a community of interests" (11.21.2). What he holds against the pagan philosophers is not their doctrine of the naturalness of civil society and the need for justice within it, but their inability to bring about a just society. The locus par excellence of justice is the city; yet justice is seldom if ever found to exist in it. Actual cities are characterized by injustice rather than by justice. In order to vindicate for them the title of cities, one would have to strike from Cicero's definition any reference to justice or virtue. Cities are groups of rational beings bound together, not by a "common acknowledgment of right," but by a "common agreement as to the objects of their love" (XIX.24), regardless of the quality of that love or the goodness or badness of its objects. In proposing this amendment Augustine is not calling for the extrusion of morality from the realm of politics, as some have contended; he is merely bemoaning its all too frequent absence from it. By asserting the necessity of justice and at the same time its practical impossibility, philosophy implicitly acknowledges its incapacity to solve society's fundamental problem. The argument was all the more compelling, as it proceeds on the basis of a premise that was indigenous to the thought of Augustine's adversaries. Simply stated, the philosophers rightly emphasize the need for justice but are powerless to secure its performance. By their own admission their model of a just society is one that exists in speech or "private discussions" only.[8]

The point is amply borne out by Augustine's probing analysis of the "embellished picture" (*picta coloribus*) (*civ. Dei* II.21.4) that Scipio paints of early Roman history in book 2 of Cicero's *De re publica*. Scipio's account is in fact a "whitewash." What Rome's vaunted past adds up to is barely more than a tissue of crimes and brutal slaughters, beginning with Romulus's murder of his brother Remus and of the Sabine king, Titus Tatius. Not surprisingly, Scipio's narrative does not extend beyond the third century B.C., the implication being that, with the rapid growth of Roman wealth and power, the outbreak of the civil wars, and the gradual disintegration of the republic in the course of the second century, not even the pretense of justice could be maintained (*civ. Dei* II.21.1). In truth, "Rome was never a republic" (II.21.4; XIX.21); the pagan "virtues" are to be reckoned "vices" (XIX.25); earthly kingdoms are nought but robber bands or "gigantic larcenies" (*magna latrocinia*) (IV.6); what Alexander does on a grand scale and with impunity is no different from what a pirate does with a single ship and at far greater personal risk (IV.4).

THE TWO CITIES

Only in the city of God, whose life is one of total acquiescence in divine revelation, is true justice to be found. Because its pattern is laid in heaven and because its perfect state is achieved only in the afterlife, the city of God is sometimes called the heavenly city; but insofar as, by adhering to Christ, human beings now have the possibility of leading virtuous lives, it already exists here on earth. For that reason it is not to be confused with Plato's ideal city, which has no existence other than in thought and speech.

In contrast to the city of God, the earthly city is guided by self-love and lives according to what Scripture calls the flesh. The term "flesh" in this context is not to be taken as referring only to the body and bodily pleasures. It is synonymous with natural man and embraces all of the human being's thoughts, actions, and desires to the extent to which they are not ordered to God as to their supreme end (XII.2 and 4). It applies not only to the voluptuary, who looks upon bodily pleasure as the highest good, but to all those who place their trust in themselves rather than in God. At the top of the list is the philosopher who, like the Platonist Porphyry, refuses out of pride to acknowledge that his happiness could come from any source other than himself and will not affirm anything that his own reason is unable to demonstrate (X.23; X.24; X.28; X.29.2). In its widest sense the earthly city is characterized by its affectation of total independence and self-

sufficiency. It presents itself as the very antithesis of the life of pious obedience ("the mother and guardian of all the virtue," XIV.12) or humble submission to the word of God. Its ancestor is the unrepentant Cain, and its rebellion reenacts the sin committed by Adam and Eve when they transgressed the divine command.

Although Augustine occasionally equates the city of God with the Church (VIII.24.2; XIII.16.1; XVI.2.3), it is clear from other statements that not everyone who is officially a member of the Church belongs to it, and that many who do not profess the Christian faith are, without their being aware of it, members of the same holy city. Anybody who is wholly dedicated to the pursuit of truth and moral virtue is implicitly a citizen of the city of God, and anybody who abandons virtue for vice is ipso facto excluded from it. What is more, any attempt to discriminate, save in a purely formal way, between the two cities is doomed to failure by the fact that it is impossible to know with certitude whether a particular human being is genuinely virtuous or not. One can observe another person's actions but not the inner dispositions from which they proceed. Even the doer of the good deed is never absolutely sure that he or she is acting out of virtue, for one can easily be deluded about the purity of one's motives. These motives belong not just to the secrets of the heart, which one can reveal if one chooses to do so, but to the secret intention of the heart, which remains obscure to everyone, including the agent himself. In this life the two cities are inextricably mixed, like the wheat and tares of the parable which must await the time of harvest before they can be separated (1.35; XI.1; XVIII.49; XX.9.1). This intermingling has caused some modern scholars to speak of a "third" city, compounded of the other two and destined to remain in that mixed state until Judgment Day. However, Augustine's sharp distinction between two and only two cities, intermixed as they may be, suggests that this is not the direction in which his thought was moving.[9]

While agreeing that there would be less strife on earth if everyone shared the same Christian religion, Augustine never regarded universal peace as a goal that could be attained in this life; nor did he draw from his monotheistic faith the conclusion that all human beings should be united politically so as to form a single world society. The passage of the *City of God* in which this question is explicitly taken up presents the happiest condition of humankind and the one most conducive to virtuous living as that wherein small cities or small kingdoms exist side by side in neighborly concord (IV.15). Unfortunately, such a condition will never be permanently realized here on earth. Whether people like it or not, war is inevitable. The wicked wage war on the just because they want to, and the just wage war on the wicked because they have to. In either case independent cities and kingdoms eventually give way to larger kingdoms or empires established through the conquest of the weaker by the stronger. The best that can be hoped for is that, when conflicts of this sort arise, the just cause will triumph over the unjust one; for nothing is more injurious to everybody, including evildoers themselves, than that the wicked should prosper and use their prosperity to oppress the good.

AUGUSTINE'S MORAL IDEAL

Augustine's own moral ideal is encapsulated in the biblical command of the love of God and neighbor, coupled with the Ciceronian notion of an eternal or natural law, defined as "that law which enjoins the preservation of the natural order and forbids its disturbance" (XIX.15), and elsewhere as the law demanding that all things be "most properly ordered" (*ordinatissima*) at all times.[10] This perfect order requires the perfect subordination of the lower to the higher both within the individual and in the whole of society. It exists in the individual when the body is ruled by the soul, when the appetites are ruled by reason, and when reason itself is ruled by God; and it exists in society at large when virtuous subjects obey wise rulers who govern in accordance with the divine will. Thus understood, the natural law represents the optimal rather than the minimal requirements of the moral life. It imposes as an obligation the possession and exercise of all the virtues, including theoretical wisdom, despite the fact that the latter is the preserve of a small number of naturally gifted and well-educated individuals.

Such a lofty ideal is obviously beyond the reach of all or most human beings, from whom only so much can be expected; for "there is no one, however laudably he may live, who does not yield in some points to the lust of the flesh" (I.9.1). What Augustine has in mind, however, is not limited to the unjust acts perpetrated out of malice or weakness by individuals or groups of individuals. It extends to the whole of human life and affects directly or indirectly every member of society. If, as Augustine maintains, earthly societies are necessarily imperfect; if every one of them, great or small, is a compact of wickedness (XIX.24); and if all rulers are pirates in disguise, it is hard to see how a good citizen could be a good Christian. One cannot live as a law-abiding member of a particular society, pay taxes to it, hold public office in it, and benefit from its always more or less unjust distribution of wealth without becoming a party to its built-in injustices. A case in point is the just-war theory, which rests on the assumption that a war can be just on one side only, for "when we wage a just war, our enemies must be sinning" (XIX.15). Yet there is

a serious question as to whether any war can be entirely just. The clearest instance of a just war is the one that is waged for the defense of one's borders. But this presupposes that the borders to be defended were acquired by just means and not through unjust aggression, as were Rome's borders. Moreover, it is rarely possible to engage in warfare without directly or indirectly inflicting harm on noncombatants and innocent bystanders. The most that Augustine is finally willing to grant is that some wars are "more just" (*justior*) than others (XV.4). Even with the best of intentions, human beings cannot avoid all complicity with the necessary evils of life.

Cicero tried to deal with this issue by appealing to the so-called "right of nations" (*jus gentium*), by which he meant that part of natural right which is harmonizable with the social life and mediates between strict natural right and civil right.[11] Included in this right of nations are such matters as private property and slavery, both of which represent a departure from natural right in the strict sense of the term: private property because material goods do not necessarily belong by nature to their de facto owners, who may or may not know how to use them well; and slavery because people who have the misfortune of being reduced to that state—usually prisoners of war—do not always deserve their fate.

Cicero's solution is the one that eventually prevailed in the West through its incorporation into Roman law and its absorption into the mainstream of the Christian tradition via Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* (V.4). It is not the solution favored by Augustine, who shunned it lest, by invoking a universally valid "right of nations" to legitimize such institutions as private property, slavery, coercive government, and the like, he should confer upon them a greater degree of sanctity or inviolability than their inherent imperfection warrants. One is always summoned to act in accordance with the highest principles of morality, which never change. What changes is the modality of their application to concrete cases. Because of the intractability of certain human situations, these principles must be diluted in order to become operative. What we end up with in such cases is a kind of lesser justice, better suited to the conditions of this life: *justitia minor huic vitae competens*.[12]

THE PROBLEM OF POLITICAL AUGUSTINIANISM

For this reason, and contrary to the stand taken by the ancient and medieval promoters of what has been labeled "political Augustinianism,"[13] there is in Augustine's view no such thing as a Christian polity. Christian wisdom and political power may occasionally coexist in a single subject, the person of the Christian ruler, but even then they remain distinct, cooperating with each other whenever possible but never merging one into the other. It is significant that in the *City of God* Constantine and Theodosius, the two most famous early Christian emperors, are praised for their private rather than their public virtues.[14]

Augustine's remarks on this subject are directed less against his pagan critics than against his own coreligionists, among them Eusebius, Lactantius, and Ambrose, who had interpreted in a temporal sense the Old Testament prophecies relating to the blessings of the messianic age and predicted an era of unprecedented prosperity under the auspices of Christianity and as a consequence of its emergence as a world religion capable of uniting all human beings in the cult of the one true God. Among the proponents of this view was a Spanish priest named Orosius, who had joined Augustine in North Africa and whose *Seven Books of Histories against the Pagans* became one of the most widely read historical books of the Middle Ages. Orosius's argument was a simple one. Just as the plagues vested on the Egyptians had stopped at ten, so the persecutions inflicted on the early Christians had stopped at the same number. Swords were being turned into plowshares, justice and peace were on the verge of forging a lasting alliance and, under the aegis of the new emperors, the kingdom of God was about to be inaugurated, not just in heaven, as some less worldly minded apologists for the Christian faith had predicted, but here on earth.[15] No doubt innocent people were still made to suffer unjustly and the wicked sometimes enjoyed undeserved prosperity; but this meant only that the former would go to heaven a little sooner and the latter to hell a little later.[16] To the Christian was promised the best of both worlds. Not only did Christianity hold out the prospect of eternal bliss in heaven, it offered human beings a solution to their most persistent problems here below.

Augustine dismisses all such interpretations as ingenious but unfounded in Scripture and contrary to its teaching (*civ. Dei* XVIII.52.1). He does not deny that human art and industry have made "stupefying" advances in the course of time, but he is quick to add that this material and intellectual progress is not necessarily accompanied by a corresponding increase in moral goodness; for if the inventions in question have benefited human beings, they can also be used to destroy them (XXII.24.2). He rejects outright the view that evils will disappear or diminish as time goes on. God, being all-powerful, could do away with evil altogether, but not without the loss of a greater good for humankind. In their own way the evils that he permits contribute to the human being's spiritual advancement. They serve as a test for the just and a

punishment for the wicked. They likewise insure that God will be loved for Himself and not merely for the material advantages accruing to people as a reward for their just deeds; and by imposing on them the necessity of overcoming these evils both within and outside of themselves, they enable them to reach ever higher levels of moral perfection.

More generally, the evils of human existence are themselves part of an overall plan that God pursues in this world. To that extent they may be said to be rational, but their rationality surpasses human reason. Beyond the fact, recorded by Sacred Scripture, that history takes its course not in cycles but along a straight line, that it advances through successive stages toward a pre-established goal, and that with the coming of Christ it has entered into its final phase, there is nothing to reveal the inner meaning of human events. To the earthly observer, these events retain their fundamental obscurity even once they have occurred. Considered in its totality, the life of temporal societies appears, not as an orderly "progression" (*procursus*) toward a determinate end, but as a simple "process" (*excursus*) by which the two cities run out their earthly existence, with its characteristic blend of successes and failures but no guarantee of salvation in this world;[17] for "only in heaven has been promised that which on earth we seek."[18]

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NOTES

1 Editor’s Note: *“The City of God”* originally appeared as *“De civitate Dei”* in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia,* ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, O.S.A. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 196-202.

2 *Retractationes* II.43.2; cf. *epistula ad Firmum,* in *Oeuvres de saint Augustin, Bibliothèque Augustinienne* 33 (Paris: Desclée, De Brouwer, 1949), 170.

3 *Ep*. 91.1.

4 Cf. *epp.* 136.2; 151.14.

5 Cf. *ep*. 138.2.12.

6 Cf. R.W. Carlyle and A.J. *Carlyle, A History of Mediaeval Political Theory in the West,* 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Edinburgh and London: W. Blackwood & Sons Ltd., 1928), 130, 164-66; H.A. Deane, *The Political and Moral Ideas of St. Augustine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 117-18.

7 Cf. G. Post, *Studies in Medieval Legal Thought: Public Law and the State, 1100-1322* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964); C. Nederman, “Nature, Sin and the Origins of Society: The Ciceronian Tradition in Medieval Thought,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49 (1988), 13-26, and “Aristotelianism and the Origins of Political Science,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52 (1991), 179-94; P.J. Weithman, “Augustine and Aquinas on Original Sin and the Function of Political Authority,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 30 (1992),

353-76.

8 *Ep*. 91.4.

9 J.-C. Guy, S.J., *Unité et structure logique de la "Cité de Dieu" de saint Augustin* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1961), 114-22.

10 *De libero arbitrio* I.6.15.

11 Cf. M. Zuckert, "Bringing Philosophy Down from the Heavens: Natural Right in the Roman Law," *Review of Politics* 51 (1989), 70-85.

12 *De spiritu et littera* XXXVI.65. Cf. O. O'Donovan, *The Problem of Setf-Love in St. Augustine* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), 141.

13 H.X. Arquillière, *L'Augustinisme politique* (Paris: Vrin, 1934).

14 Cf. J.M. Duval, "L'Éloge de Théodose dans la Cité de Dieu (V,26,1)," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 4 (1966), 135-79.

15 Cf. T.E. Mommsen, "Augustine and the Christian Idea of Progress: The Background of the *City of God," Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 (1952), 346-74; E.L. Fortin, "Augustine's *City of God* and the Modern Historical consciousness," *Review of Politics* 41 (1979), 330-32 [CE 2: 117-36]; R.A. Markus, "The Roman Empire in Early Christian Historiography," *Downside Review* 81 (1963), 342.

16 Cf. Orosius, *Historiae adversus paganos:* "For what loss is it to the Christian who is eager for eternal life to be taken away from this world at any time and by whatever means? Moreover, what gain is it to the pagan in the midst of Christians, obdurate against the faith, if he protracts his day a little longer, since he, whose conversion is despaired of, is destined to die?" Editor's Note: originally cited in Fortin, op. cit., 331, n. 41 *(CE* 2: 133, n. 41).

17 Cf. *epistula ad Firmum,* in *Bibliothèque Augustinienne* 33, 171; *civ. Dei* XV.21; *Retractationes* II.43.20.

18 *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 48.6.

II

PHILOSOPHICAL CULTURE IN THE MIDDLE AGES

7

TRANSLATIO STUDII

The New England Catholic Classical Association has recently sponsored an essay contest, open to all college students in New England, on the Christian transmission of the classics, the topic chosen for this year's essay being the notion of duty in Cicero and St. Ambrose.[1] As the general title of *Translatio Studii*—or transfer of culture—is probably unfamiliar to many of our readers, however, an attempt to clarify its meaning and state the reasons which prompted its choice may be welcome. The expression occurs in a series of medieval texts and conveys strikingly, we feel, the thought underlying the program of the Association. The idea that culture is something which is handed down from generation to generation and that the function of scholars in every age is to preserve and develop the heritage of the past appears to have been very common in the Middle Ages and, indeed, gave rise to a literary theme which we find, in authors of varying importance, from the ninth to the fourteenth century at least. In an article which deserved wider recognition, Mr. Étienne Gilson, to whom belongs the honor of having focused attention on this theme and traced its development, has already listed a number of significant texts.[2] We should like to recall these texts, along with a few others, and, at the same time, stress their significance for our own purpose.

It is a well-known fact that the originality of the Western Middle Ages, as opposed to the Byzantine Middle Ages, is due in a large measure to the break with classical culture caused by the great barbarian invasions of the fifth century and the subsequent downfall of the Western Empire. Whereas in the East we have an uninterrupted and magnificent, though at times monotonous and repetitious, tradition of scholarship, each generation carrying on the work of the preceding age to which it was linked directly, in Western Europe we witness the sudden disruption of the ancient school system and the rapid disappearance of the old cultural ideals, followed by some two and a half centuries of almost complete darkness. This difference is felt concretely when we attempt to determine the starting point of the Middle Ages. Any date chosen to mark the beginning of the Byzantine era will necessarily seem arbitrary. In the West, on the other hand, there seems to be little room for discussion, even if the dawn of the Middle Ages did break sooner over certain parts of the Roman Empire, such as Gaul, than over others. It is precisely because of this break with the past that the West, no longer bound by a continuous and venerable tradition, was eventually able to reorganize its intellectual life along new lines and to produce that startlingly original civilization known as the Latin Middle Ages.

In spite of this break, however, it would be erroneous to consider the cultural achievements of the West as the product of some kind of creation ex *nihilo.* The principal agents of the literary revival of the ninth century were the first to realize that they relied extensively upon the thinkers of the past and to acknowledge their debt to them. Nothing would have startled them more than to be told, like Solon in a famous passage of Plato's dialogues, that they were only children, young in soul, and that they did not possess a single ancient opinion transmitted by old tradition, "nor a single piece of learning that is hoary with age."[3] They preferred to look upon themselves as the genuine disciples and heirs of the classical writers. Their attitude was to consider that they were pursuing the work of the great men of antiquity and that their duty was to develop the treasures of wisdom which they had inherited from them. Just as knowledge and culture had once been the endowment of the Greeks and from there had passed to the Romans, so now they had emigrated to France where they once again flourished under the leadership of a number of prominent scholars, among whom the name of Alcuin deserves special mention.

Indeed, if anyone can be said to embody the spirit of the age, it is Alcuin. We are all vaguely familiar with the life story of the monk of York who felt that his services were needed on the continent and that he would find there a better opportunity to serve the cause of learning. For some fifteen years as Master of the Palace School and later as Abbot of St. Martin's at Tours, he gave himself up wholeheartedly to the task of promoting scholarship and of forming disciples who would, in turn, carry on his mission in remote parts of the Carolingian Empire. There are few examples in the history of humanism of a life more entirely

dedicated to the diffusion of knowledge and of a more enduring interest in the things of the mind. Alcuin may have been more intent upon preserving the intellectual inheritance of the past and passing it on to his fellow men than in opening new vistas in science; yet the services that he rendered in this respect, at a time when the wisdom of the past might have been permanently lost, as well as his importance in the intellectual evolution of the Western world, can hardly be overemphasized.

One is not surprised, therefore, to find that as early as the ninth century Alcuin was hailed as one of the champions of culture and that his name had become the symbol, as it were, of the intellectual aspirations of the age. The first evidence recorded by history to this effect seems to be the testimony of the chronicler of St. Gall, who states that "the knowledge of Alcuin bore fruit to such an extent that the Gauls, or Franks, of today have become the equals of the Greeks and the Romans of old."[4] The memory of these accomplishments lingered for a long time in the minds of historians. Centuries later, in a work which was universally known and read, Vincent of Beauvais reiterated the tribute already paid to Alcuin by the anonymous chronicler of the ninth century:

> *Hoc itaque monasterium post hoc, ut dictum est, donante Carolo, suscepit regendum Alchuinus scientia vitaque praeclarus, qui et sapientiae studium de Roma Parisiis transtulit, quod illuc quondam a Graecia translatum fuit a Romanis.*[5]

The same thought occurs in the *Great Chronicles of France,* in a passage inspired both in its form and in its content by the chronicler of St. Gall and by Vincent.[6] Finally, a chapter of the *Compendiloquium* of John of Wales (c. 1300) is entitled characteristically: *De translatione studii usque Parisium et quo tempore et a quibus translatum fuit.*[7]

This theme of the transfer of culture, already attested in the course of the century that followed Alcuin's death, seems to have taken on a new and more pregnant meaning during the so-called Renaissance of the twelfth century. Like their forebears of the time of Charlemagne, though in a different vein, the courtly writers of the period, such as the unknown author of the *Novel of Thebes* or Benedict of Saint-Maur (the author of the *Novel of Troy)* prided themselves on being the true descendants of the bards of old. The one to have given the idea its fullest expression is undoubtedly Chrétien de Troyes, in the opening lines of his *Cliges.* Few authors of that period have celebrated with greater pride and conviction the glorious migration of wisdom and chivalry from Greece to Rome and thence to France, taken here not as a nation in the modern sense of the word, but as a cultural unity:

> From the books that have been preserved we learn the deeds of men of old and of the times long since gone by. Our books have informed us that the pre-eminence in chivalry and learning once belonged to Greece. Then chivalry passed to Rome together with that highest learning which now has come to France. God grant that it may be cherished here, and that it may be made so welcome that the honor which has taken refuge with us may never depart from France.

What is remarkable from our point of view in these lines is not so much the sentiment of national pride, already expressed, and with greater force, in the *Chansons de Gestes,* as the author's truly humanistic approach to the problem of culture. Clearly, Chrétien feels that he belongs to a long tradition of scholarship, the best of which is to be found in "the books that have been preserved," in "our books." It is true that the association of chivalry and learning—or "clergy," to use the original term—has a singularly medieval ring, and no doubt in binding closely the two notions, the author is reading his own thoughts into the past to a certain extent. Yet this anachronism, if it is true, should not blind us to the fact that he considered himself, and wished to be considered by his readers, as a link in a chain that extends far beyond his own generation.

As is not uncommon in such matters, a writer who appropriates an idea already expressed by others before him will feel the need to outdo his predecessors. Froissart, who, in the preface to his *Chronicles,* describes in similar fashion the evolution of chivalry down to his day, is not content to trace its origins back to the Greeks and the Romans; he discovers its first manifestations among the Chaldeans and afterwards among the Jews and the Persians. Furthermore, if one were to read his works more closely, one might find that, though the words used are roughly the same, the ideas they express are not precisely those of the

preceding age. It is more than likely that by that time the notion of chivalry had already undergone a radical change. The author, according to all appearances, is more interested in the battle for its own sake than in the cause for which it is being waged. Apart from this consideration, however, the ideal that he defends is still linked in his mind with the accomplishments of the great civilizations of the past and, as such, bears witness to the persistence of a tradition to which the writers of that period were still proud to belong.

It should be noted, lastly, that the men with whom the preservation of this noble heritage rested realized that they could not cling to it selfishly. One must look not only toward the past but toward the future. The honor of being the depository of precious spiritual treasures entails, among other obligations, that of transmitting these treasures to the future generations. As Marie de France writes in the prologue to her *Lays:*

> Those to whom God has given the gift of comely speech should not hide their light beneath a bushel, but should willingly show it abroad. If a great truth is proclaimed in the ears of men, it brings forth fruit a hundredfold; but when the sweetness of the telling is praised of many, flowers mingle with the fruit upon the branch.

The writer who thus fulfills his mission will not die altogether; he is assured of a place in the memories of men for all time to come. The idea of immortality as achieved through a work of art may impress us as being typically pagan, and it brings to mind a number of famous passages found in classical authors. It has been shown, nevertheless, that for the medieval mind this commonplace also harks back to those passages of the Book of Wisdom alluding to the necessity of passing on without envy the God-given wisdom that it is our privilege to share. Thus thoughts that were familiar to classical literature blended with the Bible to produce that peculiar form of humanism so characteristic of the Middle Ages.

As one rereads these texts, one realizes that the men of the Middle Ages were perhaps not, after all, as hostile to the purely human aspects of culture as some historians of the past would have us believe. It was customary, not so long ago, to present the Middle Ages as a period of antihumanism, dominated by an otherworldly conception of life and, therefore, indifferent by principle to the values that we usually include under humanism. For Voltaire, French literature did not come into being until the sixteenth century. The first writer worth mentioning was Rabelais, and all that preceded his work would be conveniently dismissed under the label “Gothic barbarity.” During the Romantic period, Michelet could still define the Middle Ages as “a phrase of Porphyry in the translation of Boethius,” and most of his readers were prepared to accept the verdict. It should be stated in all fairness that the methods used by these historians did not allow them to acquire much of the information necessary to correct these views. They relied almost exclusively upon printed sources, and these were usually very scanty concerning the period under consideration. It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that the modern techniques of historical research began to be used on a large scale. We tend to forget, for example, that many of the literary masterpieces of the Middle Ages were unknown a little over a century ago. The *Song of Roland,* to mention only one of the most famous, was published for the first time in 1832. Though much has been done since then to broaden our horizon and impose a view that corresponds more closely to fact, the inveterate prejudice against the Middle Ages is still felt in certain intellectual circles, and many university professors today deplore the fact that medieval studies have failed to reach the broad audience they deserve.

It is significant, on the other hand, that the renewal of interest in culture that we observe in the Carolingian period was largely, in the beginning, the work of an English monk. If one were to seek the first signs of the future Renaissance of the ninth century, one would undoubtedly have to go back to the Irish monks of the sixth century, well protected by their isolation and rigorous asceticism against the ravages of Mediterranean paganism. The remark has often been made that the attitude of these Celtic monks toward pagan or profane culture was in general more optimistic than that of the writers on the continent and, in particular, than that of the Christian writers of late antiquity. In most cases, the Fathers of the late Roman Empire were themselves products of that pagan culture. They were indebted to it for their intellectual formation, as there did not exist at the time an independent Christian culture that might have dispensed them from reading the pagan classics. The authors read and explained in class were those who had molded generations of children in the purest pagan tradition. It goes without saying that some parts of these works appeared highly objectionable in the light of Christian teaching and morals. Anyone who has read the *Confessions* of St. Augustine will have some idea of how the ways of the pagan gods as portrayed by Terence, for example, were likely to impress a Christian of the fourth or the fifth century. Enhanced by

literary qualities that had no parallel anywhere, these works presented dangers against which it was necessary to take the proper precautions. That the stand of the Fathers toward pagan literature should have been ambiguous is, therefore, no mystery. Even as late as the sixth century, men like St. Benedict still felt intensely the need to break with a world that did not correspond fully to the requirements of their faith and to seek refuge in the wilderness, away from the perils of a corrupt civilization.

Not so with the English and Irish monks who were to play such an important part in the development of the new culture of the Middle Ages. Having been educated in an entirely Christian atmosphere they were liberated interiorly from the start and felt none of the distrust of their ancestors of the patristic age toward classical literature. The pagan gods had long ceased to be the rivals of the true God in the hearts of men and even monks could, with little danger, read the classics and gather from them whatever elements could be integrated into a Christian framework. It is not surprising, therefore, that scholars like Alcuin could present themselves openly, as we have seen, as the successors and heirs of the Greeks and the Romans.

Still more important perhaps is the manner in which the scholars of the Middle Ages read the writers of the past. Time does not allow us to dwell extensively on this point, though its importance cannot be exaggerated. The very fact that Alcuin and his followers considered themselves the disciples of the classical authors is an indication of the respect in which these were held. Far from assuming that they were superior to the ancients in every respect, their foremost preoccupation was to preserve the treasures of human culture that had been accumulated by their predecessors. Everything points to the fact that they treated the men of the past with far more consideration than many modern scholars. The attitude of modern scholarship was for a long time, and is still today in many circles, to consider the thought of our own age as essentially superior to the thought of the past. Once this principle is accepted, it becomes increasingly difficult to take the writers of the past seriously. Thus the tendency has been to read the classical authors in much the same manner as a chemist today reads the works of Lavoisier, that is to say, from a purely historical point of view and not at all because we may still have something to learn from them. By this very fact, the classics have seemed to lose much of their vital interest. We might even say, without indulging in paradox, that the decline of classical studies, so characteristic of our times, is due largely to the classical scholars themselves. If the classics are really dead, why bother with them, and why not simply let the dead bury the dead?

In view of the present crisis of classical studies, it seems more than ever necessary to reconsider the modern position. The peculiar situation in which we find ourselves suggests that perhaps our own accomplishments not only have not invalidated those of the past, but have often failed to match them. That more and more scholars today are prepared to admit that the ancients have more to offer than was commonly assumed two generations ago is indicative of this new trend. The renewed interest in classical and, now, patristic studies is another manifestation of the same phenomenon. In like manner, we are perhaps in a better position to understand that attitude of the medieval scholars with regard to the ancients and, in certain cases, to share it. The greatest among the medieval Christian writers felt that they could not shun the work of their predecessors if they were to produce anything of value themselves. In the well-known words of Peter of Blois, “we are like dwarfs hoisted on the shoulders of these giants; if we see farther than they, it is thanks to them precisely.”[8] However prudent the Fathers of the Church may have been, they at least realized that whatever progress they could accomplish would come about not by a denial of the past, but by a serious effort to build upon it. Recent experience, if nothing else, has taught us that it is usually dangerous to rely exclusively upon our own “bank and capital,” in Burke’s phrase, and to refuse to take the past into account. The most reasonable position may well be the one that invites us to look toward both the past and the future before embarking on a new adventure. St. Augustine may have had something like this in mind when he wrote in the *City of God:*

> It is not as if the knowledge of God were of various kinds, knowing in different ways things which as yet are not, things which are, and things which have been. For not in our fashion does He look forward to what is future, nor at what is present, nor back upon what is past, but in a manner quite different and far and profoundly remote from our way of thinking.[9]

NOTES

1 Editor’s Note: “Translatio Studii” originally appeared in *Folia: Studies in the Christian Perpetuation of the Classics* 10:2 (1956), 43-51. The contest that Fortin references began in 1956 and was held annually for at

least the next twelve years.

2 “L‘Humanisme médiéval,” in *Revue Trimestrielle Canadienne* (March 1930), 1-17; reprinted in Étienne Gilson, *Les idées et les lettres* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1932), 171-96.

3 *Timaeus* 22b.

4 *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores,* vol. 2, ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz (Hannoverae: Hahn, 1829), 731; cf. Gilson, *Les idées,* 183.

5 “Consequently, after this, it is said that through a gift of Charlemagne the rule of this monastery was undertaken by Alcuin, who was illustrious by virtue of his knowledge and his life and who also transferred the study of wisdom from Rome to Paris, which had once been transferred thither by the Romans from Greece” *(Speculum Historiale* XXIII. 173; cf. Gilson, loc. cit.).

6 *Les Grandes Chroniques de France,* Vol. III, ed. Jules Viard (Paris: Libraire Ancienne, Édouard Champion, 1923), 168-69; cf. Gilson, loc. cit.

7 “On the Transfer of Culture to Paris: At What Time and by Whom It Was Transferred” (*Summa Joannis Valensis de Regimine Vitae Humanae seu Margarita Doctorum,* Bibl. Nat., Res. D. 17239 and 17240; cf. Gilson, loc. cit.).

8 *Ep.* 92. Editor’s Note: Appropriately, Peter’s image is taken from his possible master John of Salisbury, who in turn attributes it to Bernard of Chartres (cf. John of Salisbury, *Metalogicus* III.4).

9 *De civitate Dei* XI.21.

8

THOMAS AQUINAS AS A POLITICAL THINKER

Some forty-five years ago, the well-known historian of medieval political theory A.P. d'Entrèves published a book entitled *Dante as a Political Thinker,* in which he traced what he understood to be the evolution of Dante's political vision from one period to another of his career.[1] Whether and to what extent Dante's thought underwent such an evolution is a question on which scholars have yet to agree. Whatever the answer to it may be, one thing is certain: Dante is an intensely and unabashedly political writer. His was the first generation to have access to Aristotle's *Politics* (in the Latin translation provided by William of Moerbeke), and he was the first member of that generation to bring the principles of Aristotelian philosophy to bear on the nagging dilemmas of a society governed by two distinct and often competing powers, the spiritual and the temporal—more concretely, the pope and the emperor. For Dante, political philosophy was the master discipline that teaches human beings how to live well in association with one another and that leads them to the goal of happiness they all seek. Ignorance of that discipline, he thought, was the root cause of the painful struggles that had been afflicting the Christian West for a century or more and from which he personally had had so much to suffer.

By contrast, no one thinks of Thomas Aquinas as first and foremost a political thinker. The bulk of his enormous production is devoted to the exploration of problems of a theoretical nature, whether philosophic or theological. From Thomas one learns next to nothing about the dominant structures and inner tensions of medieval society. What was for Dante the burning issue of his day is at best a minor theme of Thomas' works. Although the beginning of Thomas' academic career coincides with the demise of the brilliant Frederick II (who died, excommunicated, in 1250), one combs his voluminous corpus in vain for any allusion to the declining fortunes of the Holy Roman Empire or any mention of the emperor. As Étienne Gilson put it tersely but accurately, "This theologian views everything as if the Emperor did not exist."[2] Never or only very rarely are the standards of political judgment that were part of his Aristotelian heritage invoked to shed light on a situation from which, as someone who sees all things in the light of eternity, he appears to have been only too eager to prescind. Typical of Thomas' approach to politics is his short treatise *On the Way of Life of the Jews (De Regimine Iudaeorum),* addressed to the Duchess of Brabant, who had sought his advice about the best way to deal with certain Jews who were practicing usury in her realm. The work begins and ends with the observation that since he, Thomas, had little direct knowledge of such matters, his opinion was not to be preferred to that of more experienced and better qualified judges.

THE RECOVERY OF ARISTOTLE'S *POLITICS* AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

The preceding remarks are not meant to minimize in the least the significance of Thomas' achievement in the political domain. That significance is perhaps best conveyed by saying that Thomas is the one who introduced political philosophy into medieval Christendom, an event that marks a crucial turning point in its long history. Prior to that time, people knew from the *Nicomachean Ethics* and various ancient or early medieval lists or doxographies that Aristotle had written a treatise on the science of government, but no one had a clear idea of what its content might be. The only information available on the subject consisted of an amalgam of more or less disparate fragments drawn directly or indirectly from Cicero, Varro, the *Decretum* or code of canon law compiled by Gratian toward the middle of the twelfth century (the christianized version of Roman law that most countries of Western Europe had adopted at about the same time) and, above all, Augustine's *City of God,* although that began to be read consistently only from the fourteenth century onward.

The Bible itself, that great fountainhead of religious thought in the West, had practically nothing to say about political regimes, apart for some passing remarks on the dangers of monarchic rule at the time of its establishment in ancient Israel (see 1 Sam. 8:4-21) and on what later writers took to be an adumbration of the Aristotelian notion of the mixed regime in Exodus (18:21) and Deuteronomy (1:15), where Elders

chosen from among the people were associated with Moses in the governance of the community. The New Testament had even less to offer. As the founding document of a missionary religion destined to be preached to all nations, it had to avoid being too specific in such matters. It began by abrogating the civil laws contained in the Hebrew Scriptures and left it to human beings to devise the laws needed for the proper administration of their temporal affairs. One could read its message and decide that the best way to live the Christian life was to conquer the world for Christ, as the *conquistadores* of Spain's Golden Age tried to do, or go off into the wilderness and lead a life of solitary contemplation, like Antony and the monks of the Egyptian desert. This total lack of genuine political guidance is the prime reason that the Christian world eventually showed itself receptive to the *Politics,* whereas Judaism and Islam, the two other great religions of the West, shunned it altogether, lest by seeking the help of a pagan philosopher they should appear to be doubting the wisdom of the divinely revealed laws by which they were governed.

With the advent of the *Politics* the situation changed radically. Here at last was a complete and coherent account of the political life to which Christians could appeal when dealing with the seemingly intractable problems that confronted them. Aristotle's emphasis on the naturalness of civil society, rather than its divinely revealed origin, made possible a much sharper delineation of the respective spheres of political and ecclesiastical authority. The *Politics* had the further merit of making its readers aware of the whole range of human possibilities and, in particular, of the existence of a variety of legitimate regimes among which one could choose in accordance with the specific needs and capabilities of each city or country. Were it not for the recovery of the *Politics,* Western society might have taken a very different turn. It could have opted either for the papal theocracy toward which it had been leaning for quite some time or else for the imperial absolutism or "caesaropapism" that prevailed in the East. Instead, it adopted a more flexible arrangement whereby a judicious balance between the two powers was maintained and a measure of freedom injected into its public life. It is questionable whether anything like this could have happened had Thomas not been able to accredit Aristotle as the Western world's premier philosophic authority and bring him into the Christian fold, if not as a full-fledged citizen, at least as a highly respected resident alien.

Deciphering and translating the *Politics* proved to be a gigantic task, especially as, unlike the rest of Aristotle's major works, the *Politics* penetrated into the West without the benefit of any earlier Arabic or Greek commentary. Strange as it may seem, no such commentary had ever been written. One presumes that, in their self-interest, the rulers of the great ecumenical empires of the Hellenistic and Roman periods—among whom must be counted some of the most hateful tyrants known to history—were not of a mind to encourage the diffusion of a book whose principles could be used to undermine their authority. Also painfully lacking at the time was an adequate political vocabulary. It is for that reason that all the medieval commentators on the *Politics* felt obliged to define the terms used by Aristotle. The critical edition of Thomas Aquinas' commentary lists no fewer than eighty-five definitions of this kind, considered necessary because the terms in question were neologisms. The Latin world had never heard of an aristocracy or an oligarchy, two words that were not yet part of its vocabulary, and it had only the vaguest idea of what Aristotle meant by a *polis,* the Greek word for "city." The most common political entities then in existence were kingdoms, principalities, duchies, republics, seignories, nations, or communes, none of which corresponded exactly to the small Greek city. This being the case, how could the *polis* be held up as a model of the "perfect" human association? For those and similar reasons, including Aristotle's notoriously elliptical style, it was not easy to obtain a decent translation of the text. Moerbeke was nevertheless able to produce one that, for all its pardonable and relatively minor defects, had literalness in its favor and did a remarkably good job of rendering the author's essential meaning.

Unfortunately, Thomas' *Commentary on the Politics,* undertaken during the last years of his life, when Moerbeke's translation finally came out, was never completed. It covers only the most general part of Aristotle's treatise (roughly 25 percent of it) and breaks off abruptly after Book 3, chapter 6—at the precise point where Aristotle turns to a discussion of the individual regimes. (The rest of the commentary as it appears in a number of modern editions is the work of Thomas' disciple, Peter of Auvergne.) The work is prefaced by a valuable *prooemium* or introduction, the first of its kind as regards the *Politics,* in which the nature of this hitherto unknown science is explained: its subject matter, its necessity, its aim as a practical science, its relation to the other practical sciences, and its proper method.

THOMAS' GENERAL MODE OF PROCEDURE: THE DEVIATIONS FROM ARISTOTLE

Thomas' general approach to the study of ethics and politics is best understood by comparison with that of his illustrious Christian predecessor Saint Augustine, who had been since late antiquity the preeminent theological authority in the Christian West. Augustine uses an approach that is akin to that of Plato and is notorious for its peculiar radicalism. The *City of God,* the most political of his many books, analyzes all

things in the light of their highest principles or, as one might say, in the light of the Platonic ideas, rather than as they look to decent nonphilosophers, who are wont to take a more commonsensical view of things. For Augustine, as for Plato, goodness is synonymous with perfection or wholeness. Any declension from the ideal or defect in any of its parts is enough to vitiate the whole. This explains the seeming hyperbolism that characterizes so many of Augustine's most famous sayings: All kingdoms are gigantic larcenies, and all rulers bandits in disguise. What Alexander does on a grand scale and with a huge fleet at his disposal is no better that what a pirate does by himself with a lone ship. Rome was never a city; pagan virtues are nothing but vices; and so the list goes on.[3] Augustine's preference for this method of procedure is explained by the fact that the *City of God* was aimed in large part at the pagan holdouts of his time, many of them ardent patriots who felt that embracing a transpolitical faith such as Christianity would be to betray their country at a time when it most needed their support. The best way to help them overcome their scruples was to play up the limitations of the political life and, by so doing, convince them that it was unworthy of their exclusive attachment.

Thomas, for his part, lived in a wholly different world, one that was populated by Christians, ruled by Christians, and informed by Christian principles. Gone were the wrenching conflicts experienced by people torn between the requirements of the Sermon on the Mount and the brutal demands of the old Roman Empire. *Ceteris paribus,* his situation was analogous to that of Aristotle, who arrived on the scene once the death of Socrates had put an end, for the time being, to the clash between Athens and philosophy. Accordingly, Thomas could deal with moral phenomena on their own level or as they present themselves to well-bred human beings who take morality for granted and do not need to be persuaded of its superiority to a life of injustice or self-indulgence. This is what gives to Aristotle's works the so-named Jane-Austenian quality that is so admired in them, and it is what made Thomas' approach attractive to a world in which one could be at once a good citizen and a good Christian.

This is not to say that Thomas' mode of procedure is in all particulars identical to that of Aristotle. On the whole, it is less empirical and more deductive than Aristotle's. Unlike Aristotle, Thomas does not simply list the eleven moral virtues; he relates them to one another and to the powers of the soul, and he does not leave it to the reader to rank them. He is also more definite about the ends of human action and the choice of the means by which they may be attained. Something of the flavor of Aristotle's presentation may be lost *en route,* but we still remain in what is plainly recognizable Aristotelian territory.

As to the content of Thomas' political philosophy, it follows as closely as possible that of his pagan mentor. There are, nevertheless, a number of points on which Thomas was forced to deviate from Aristotle, usually for the sake of showing how his teaching could be brought into greater harmony with the Christian faith. I limit myself to four examples, where the deviation is most noticeable.

The first is Thomas' natural law theory, which bears a certain affinity with Aristotle's natural right theory, but is by no means identical to it. Aristotle's highest moral principles are not couched in legal terms and are not called laws. As distinguished from the civil law, the natural law, assuming that there is such a thing, is a law of the cosmos, binding on all human beings at all times and enforced by the ruler of the whole universe, who can only be God. For a law that has no coercive power *(vis coactiva),* that is to say, a law that has no teeth in it nor any sanctions attached to it, is not a law in the proper sense of the word—and Thomas insists that the natural law is indeed a law in the proper sense: *proprie lex dicitur* (see, to begin with, *Summa Theologiae* I-II.90.3, 4). But Aristotle's God is not a legislating God or a ruler in any true sense of the word: As the "thought that thinks itself," he has nothing to do with the affairs of this world. Thomas can speak with confidence of a natural law because he has divine revelation on which to rely for the notion of an all-knowing and providential God who metes out just rewards or punishments either in this life or in the next. The perfect moral consistency of the universe is thereby guaranteed. No one gets away with anything. One is always sooner or later made to pay for one's crimes. There are no successful wrongdoers or happy crooks, a breed about which, if Nietzsche is right, moralists have always maintained a strange silence. It is interesting to note that the Christian world is the only one in which the natural law has played a significant role over the centuries, even though objections to it have often been raised on philosophic as well as on political grounds. Philosophers have opposed it on the ground that it deprives statesmen of the flexibility they need to administer the affairs of state, and theologians have opposed it because it supposedly imposes limits on God's freedom. If the principles of the natural law are truly universal, as Thomas holds them to be, it becomes hard to see how God could remain the *Pantocrator* or omnipotent being of whom the Bible speaks: strictly speaking, God would not be able to perform miracles or change His mind. There are subtle theological answers to both of those objections, but they need not detain us here.

My second example has to do with birth control (through abortion) and the exposure of defective or

unwanted children, both of which Aristotle condones under certain unusual circumstances *(Politics* VI.1335b20-26). The passage in question occurs in the section of the *Politics* on which Thomas did not comment. But we have an idea of what he would have said from an article in the *Summa Theologiae* (II-II.64.6) in which the question asked is whether it is ever permissible to kill an innocent person. Thomas' answer is a resounding "No"—*nullo modo licet occidere innocentem*-buttressed by a reference to Exodus 23:7, which states: "You shall not put an innocent and just person to death." Behind Thomas' position is the issue of the dignity of the human being as a creature made in the image of God, another biblical concept that does not carry the same weight in all other traditions.

My third example is slavery. For Aristotle, legal slavery—as opposed to natural slavery or the enslavement of people who do not have the rational capacity to rule themselves—is simply unjust *(Politics* I.1254b8f). It becomes just when its suppression would entail the loss of a necessary good, such as the preservation of civilization, which in the centuries that preceded the technological revolution was dependent on slave labor. In all such cases the slave must be set free as soon as circumstances permit. Thomas, who follows Roman law on this point, defends legal slavery on the twofold ground that it was sanctioned by the Ciceronian and Roman law notion of *jus gentium* or the "law of nations" and that it was good for both parties: for the slave, usually a prisoner of war whose life was thus spared, and for the slave owner, who would benefit from his services. Thomas, who was held to the norms of a stricter morality, was loath to accept an arrangement that could not in an important sense be called just and paradoxically ended up defending the justice of a practice that Aristotle did not wish to dignify by that name.

My final example is on divine worship and the cult of the pagan gods, which, for a Christian such as Thomas, was obviously a matter of the utmost seriousness. The prohibition of idolatry was the one commandment that in the biblical tradition brooked no exceptions. In discussing it, Thomas states that, like Saint Lawrence, one had to be prepared to suffer death on a grill rather than succumb to it. Aristotle was less demanding; for him, the cult of the city's gods was an essential part of the political life and hence right by nature. The question of the existence or the truth of those gods, in whom, needless to say, he did not believe, could be conveniently brushed aside.

MODERN THOMISM AND POLITICS

Thomas belongs, as we know, to a small group of transcendent geniuses whose writings gave birth to schools named after them, in this case Thomism or, more recently, Neo-Thomism. Left for dead during the heyday of the Enlightenment, a victim of the vicious attacks that had been mounted against him, Thomas was miraculously brought back to life by the Romantic Movement and the religious revival of the nineteenth century. His recovery began in an obscure way in northern Italy circa 1810 and continued to develop until the once ailing patient received a clean bill of health in the form of an encyclical letter by Pope Leo XIII *(Aeterni Patris,* 1879), in which Thomas was hailed as "the special bulwark and glory of the Catholic Faith." A year later, Thomas was proclaimed the universal patron saint of Catholic schools. Two canons of the new code of Canon Law promulgated in 1917 (numbers 589 and 1366) stipulated that henceforth Catholic philosophy and theology were to be taught in Thomas' spirit (*mens*) and in accordance with his method and principles. This is not the place to retell the fascinating story of Neo-Thomism from its humble beginnings to its anticlimactic decline since the end of Vatican Council II in 1965. Instead, I shall focus on one point that is more directly relevant to a discussion of Thomas' political thought.

I began this article by saying that Thomas is not primarily known for his work in political theory, a subject that occupies at best a secondary place in his writings. It is thus not surprising that, with rare exceptions, the school that takes its name from him should have failed to produce political theorists of the first rank. That does not mean, however, that politics played no role in the modern Thomistic movement. In often unrecognized or unacknowledged ways, Thomas was called on to provide the rationale for much of what went on within the Roman Catholic Church during that period.

This much is apparent in one highly visible phenomenon, the rise of Catholic conservatism, inspired in large part by the severe setbacks that the Church had suffered at the time of the French Revolution and such other crucial events as the loss of the Papal States, along with the temporal power that went with them, in 1870. By way of a reaction to those events came the dream of a return to an earlier and more perfect situation, identified neither with the now discredited *Ancien Regime* nor the Counter Reformation, but with a newly rediscovered, still poorly understood, and vastly idealized political entity known as medieval Christendom. The essence of that dream is well expressed by Giuseppe Martina, who writes, in connection with the secularization of the former Papal States:

> The taking of Rome did not only mean the annexation of the city to the Kingdom of Italy and the crowning of Cavour's vision of the unity of Italy, nor only the end of the Popes' temporal power, but also the disappearance of a political and social structure anchored in models of the *ancien regime,* with its tight connection between civil and religious life. Without a deeper analysis, we recall some of its typical elements: the official recognition of Catholicism as the State-religion, religious unity as the foundation of political unity, the resulting discrimination and religious intolerance, the relevance of the norms of canon law for civil legislation, the traditional ecclesiastical immunities, the Church's monopoly in education and assistance, the broad support of the secular arm, psychological pressures more or less energetically exercised upon the faithful for the fulfillment of their religious duties.[4]

In retrospect, it is evident that virtually all of the most remarkable doctrinal, pastoral, devotional, and organizational achievements of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Catholic conservatism—not least of all the promotion of Thomas Aquinas as the premier intellectual authority in the Church—were in large measure manifestations of the same spirit. One gathers as much when one reads Pope Leo XIII's encyclical on Thomas, which is more symptomatic of a new Catholic longing for the reconstitution of Catholic Christendom than of any disinterested thirst for knowledge.

Equally important from the point of view of the present argument is the emergence in those years of a parallel undercurrent of Catholic liberal thought, which also looked to the Middle Ages and Thomas Aquinas for its justification. Liberal democracy was obviously here to stay, and to continue to oppose it, as the Church had been doing for so long, seemed to some Catholics to be futile and counterproductive. Since, to paraphrase Lord Acton, sacred kingship had been replaced by sacred property, the best thing to do was to make one's peace with it and avail oneself of the many advantages it afforded, especially now that the old revolutionary animus against religion had abated and a more conciliatory mood had begun to set in. The question was how to explain to thinking persons in the Church that the still-much-decried modern liberal constitutionalism was fully in accord with Christianity. For this purpose, a new argument was developed, the object of which was to show that the very roots of liberal democracy were to be found in medieval Christianity.

Early Catholic support for this novel theory came from Lord Acton in a famous essay entitled "History of Freedom in Christianity," which attributes the doctrine of popular sovereignty, the cornerstone of modern liberalism, to Thomas Aquinas, whose language, Acton says, "contains the earliest exposition of the Whig theory of the revolution."[5] The trouble is that the long text that Acton imputes to Thomas has yet to be found as such anywhere in Thomas' works. As a good Aristotelian, Thomas acknowledged the existence of a plurality of just and legitimate regimes, but without recommending the establishment of any one of them over the others. That decision was to be left to the discretion of wise and well-informed rulers or potential rulers, who alone are in a position to determine on the spot which one is most appropriate for this or that particular group. To be sure, Thomas recommended popular participation in a mixed regime, but contrary to what Acton claims, he never subscribed to the typically modern notion of popular sovereignty as a universal principle. Like Aristotle, he looked on the consent of the ruled as a condition of good government —without it, no one can rule effectively—but not as its sole source.

None of this prevented numerous other twentieth-century scholars and writers from adopting Acton's continuity thesis or something similar to it. Among them are to be counted such well-known names as Henry Adams (in *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres),* R.W. and A.J. Carlyle, George Sabine, Charles McIlwain, J.N. Figgis, James H. Walsh (in his popular book *The Thirteenth, Greatest of all Centuries,* first published in 1907), Walter Lippmann, and Ernest Barker, who declares flatly:

> Saint Thomas—like the clerical thinkers of the Middle Ages in general—is a Whig; he believes in popular sovereignty, popular institution of monarchy, a pact between king and people, and the general tenets of Locke. It was not idly that Sir Robert Filmer wrote that "this tenent [sic] was first hatched in the Schools and has been fostered by all succeeding papists for good divinity."[6]

Even more emphatic is the statement by the distinguished scholar Carlton J.H. Hayes, a convert to Catholicism and the holder of a chair in history at Columbia University, who asserted boldly that the United

States was “the daughter of the Catholic Church” and that “[n]ot only was this continent discovered and opened to the world by Catholics, but [that] our country could not possibly be what it is now had it not been for Catholic Christianity.”[7] The medieval origin of American liberties was also affirmed by John Courtney Murray, S.J., in his influential *We Hold These Truths,* a book claimed, interestingly enough, by present-day liberals and neoconservatives alike. Commenting on this whole development, Philip Gleason wrote in his recent book *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford, 1995): “As ‘an idea, a type of culture,’ Catholicism had shaped the whole of Western civilization so deeply that every institution and ideal of true Americanism had its ‘embryo and type... in Catholic theory and practice”’ (128). Catholicism was not only compatible with liberal democracy; for all practical purposes, it was identical with it.

What is gradually becoming clear in this protracted tug of war between conservatives and liberals is that both sides are at one in their attempt to politicize Thomas and, with him, the whole of the Christian revelation. The politicizing tendencies of the liberal side are plain enough and leave little doubt in anybody’s mind about their true nature. What had not been fully appreciated until recently is the extent to which similar politicizing tendencies were at work among Thomas’ conservative interpreters. They, too, ran the risk of obscuring the transpolitical character of the Christian faith and of contributing in their own manner to what Robert Nisbet has called the “demise of transcendental Christianity.” Given this situation, one way to think about Thomas and his timeliness as a political thinker would be to ask whether his own, more detached approach to the question of Christianity and its relation to the political order might not be the one that is best suited to the needs of our troubled age. Only by resisting both the reactionary and the progressive temptations of our time can Christianity remain true to itself, while playing a salutary role in moderating the tendency inherent in liberal democracy, or any other regime for that matter—to make itself the sole principle of the human quest for happiness.[8]

NOTES

1 Alessandro d‘Entrèves, *Dante as a Political Thinker* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952). Editor’s Note: “Thomas Aquinas as a Political Thinker” originally appeared in *Perspectives on Political Science* 26:2 (1997), 92-96.

2 E. Gilson, *Dante and Philosophy,* trans. D. Moore (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968), 172.

3 Cf. *CE* 1: 24-28.

4 G. Martina, “La fine del potere temporale nella coscienza religiosa e nella cultura dell’epoca in Italia,” *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae* 9 (1971), 343-44. See Joseph A. Komonchak, “The Enlightenment and the Construction of Roman Catholicism,” *CCICA Annual* 4 (1985), 34-35.

5 Lord Acton, *The History of Freedom and Other Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1907), 36. Acton’s essay had been delivered as an address as far back as 1877.

6 Ernest Barker, “Introductory: Mediaeval Political Thought,” in *The Social and Political Ideas of Some Great Medieval Thinkers,* ed. F.J.C. Hearnshaw (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1967), 21-22.

7 Carlton J. H. Hayes, “Obligations to America,” *Commonweal* 1-8 (31 December 1924), 200.

8 Editor’s Note: the original essay included the postscript: “I wish to thank Professor Daniel Mahoney of Assumption College for his help with the final draft of this article.”

9

DANTE AND AVERROISM

The charge of Averroism appears to have been leveled at Dante for the first time by the Dominican Guido Vernani in his *De reprobatione monarchiae,* written in 1327, some six years after Dante's death.[1] The reference to Averroes on which the accusation is founded occurs in *De monarchiae* 1.3 and forms part of a general argument by which Dante attempts to show that the wellbeing of mankind is contingent on the establishment of a world government or the universal rule of a single just man. Haying demonstrated that man's proper work consists in the exercise of his reason, Dante goes on to state that the total capacity of mankind's intellectual power is not exhausted by one individual or group of individuals but requires for its full actualization a multiplicity or succession of human generations. This opinion, he adds, is shared by Averroes in his commentary on Aristotle's *De anima.*[2] The rest of the argument runs briefly as follows. Man cannot dedicate himself wholly to the pursuit of his intellectual perfection so long as he does not live in peace with his fellow men. Of all the means ordered to the attainment of that perfection, peace is by far the greatest, and universal peace is not likely to be achieved unless the entire human race is brought under the jurisdiction of an all-embracing imperial authority.

EVIDENCE OF AVERROISM?

Apart from the text just mentioned, Averroes is named explicitly only four times in all of Dante's works. There is, to begin with, the famous fourth Canto of the *Inferno,* in which Averroes, identified simply as the author of the "great commentary" (on Aristotle), appears side by side with a group of other illustrious philosophers in limbo.[3] One finds two more allusions to Averroes in the mysterious *Quaestio de aqua et terra,* the first in relation to a statement, later rejected, to the effect that any opinion that runs counter to sense experience is erroneous,[4] and the second in relation to the proposition according to which all forms capable of being received by matter already exist as ideas in the mind of the prime mover.[5] Finally, in the *Convivio,* Averroes is invoked as the authority for the view that all of man's natural desires are ordered to a natural end and that, since the desire for scientific knowledge is natural, it too has its end, in the attainment of which it comes to rest, even though, for lack of proper guidance, those who succeed in completing the day's journey are few in number.[6]

All of these texts, one gathers, are reconcilable with orthodox Christian belief, and none, taken either by itself or in combination with the others, would seem to provide enough evidence to brand Dante as an Averroist. The text from *De monarchiae* in particular, which is the only one adverted to by Vernani, can hardly be construed at first sight as an expression of the Averroistic teaching concerning the numerical identity of the human intellect, and all the less so as Averroes is merely cited as the corroborator and not the originator of the opinion in question, as the wording of the sentence—*huic sententiae concordat Averrois* —clearly indicates. What is more, this same doctrine of the unicity of the human intellect, to which Vernani accuses Dante of subscribing, is expressly repudiated by Dante himself in the very section of the *Convivio* in which Averroes' name appears.[7]

One is therefore not surprised to find that, with rare exceptions, modern scholars have rallied to Dante's defense and dismissed as baseless the indictment brought against him by his opponent.[8] The soundness of their judgment is apparently confirmed by the fact that Vernani's attack seems to have met with little success in his own lifetime and in the years that followed. Contrary to what might have been expected, the *De reprobatione monarchiae* is not even listed in any of the catalogues of Dominican writers compiled during the Middle Ages.[9] The omission is all the more striking as the book presents a vibrant apology for both papal authority and traditional Christian orthodoxy. Why the author should have received no credit for an endeavor that would normally have elicited the approval of his superiors remains mysterious, especially since his adversary, for all the respect that he commanded, had long been a controversial figure, excommunicated and banished during the last twenty years of his life and never very much in favor in high

ecclesiastical circles.

The mere absence of specifically heretical quotations from Averroistic sources in Dante's works does not, however, suffice to absolve the author of every taint of heterodoxy. At best it proves only that, if he was an Averroist, he did not wish to be known as one. Numerous other passages, as we shall see, betray signs of an unmistakable sympathy for doctrines commonly associated with Averroism. Professor Gilson has spoken in this connection of an Averroistic tone in Dante and suggested that, in the realm of politics at least, Dante's position may have been closer to that of the Islamic philosophers than to the mainstream of Christian thought.[10] Following Thomas Aquinas, Dante distinguishes clearly between the domains of ecclesiastical and political authority and their respective ends, but he goes much further than his predecessor in emphasizing their separation and proclaiming their mutual independence.[11] One can readily understand that his Ghibelline tendencies and his undisguised hostility toward all forms of papal involvement in temporal matters would have prompted him to lay greater stress on the autonomy of the natural order and the right of the civil power to the free exercise of its prerogatives. His political views would thus appear to be, if not necessarily derived from, at least akin to those of the Arabic Philosophers, in whose works the typical Western alliance between *sacerdotium* and *regnum* is replaced by the secular alliance between philosophers and princes friendly to philosopher. [12]

Nor can one pretend that with this important concession all further suspicions of diffuse or latent Averroism have been laid to rest. The question arises as to whether Dante's political Averroism is not itself rooted in a theoretical Averroism the exact nature of which is not immediately accessible to the casual reader. Whether or not any definitive answer to this larger question is even possible remains uncertain. In view of the extensive use of the allegorical method in the *Divine Comedy* and elsewhere, to say nothing of the many other devices by which Dante sought to conceal his thought,[13] it is unlikely that one could ever arrive at a conclusion based on reasons entirely convincing to everybody. By the same token, elementary prudence would dictate that no alternative, however strange or seemingly farfetched, be left unexamined or discounted *a priori.* There is a possibility that, by following attentively some of the hints that have been artfully distributed throughout Dante's writings, one may succeed in uncovering not so much perhaps his own private thought on the matter at hand as the basic issue with which the veiled and deliberately ambiguous expression of that thought was meant to challenge us.

THE CASE OF STATIUS

One such hint has to do with the poet Statius, whose role in the *Divine Comedy* poses a problem that has long baffled Dante scholars and to which, as far as I have been able to determine, no altogether satisfactory solution has ever been proposed.[14] This in itself is not unusual, inasmuch as one could point to any number of unsolved riddles in Dante's poem. In the present instance, however, the enigma is all the more tantalizing as Statius occupies in the action of the *Divine Comedy* a position of prominence second only to that of Virgil and Beatrice.[15] It is barely imaginable that Dante would have left us without any clue whatever as to the significance of his presence in the overall economy of the poem. Let us begin by recalling the salient details of the initial meeting between the poets.

In the course of their journey through the mountain of Purgatory, Dante and Virgil encounter Statius on the ledge of the avaricious. There follows a touching recognition scene in which, forgetting for a moment that they are shades, Statius rushes to embrace his revered master.[16] Virgil's first reaction is one of surprise at the thought that a wise poet like Statius should have been guilty of avarice; whereupon Statius explains that his sin was not really greed but its no doubt less contemptible opposite, prodigality, and that he finds himself among the avaricious because vices opposed to the same virtue are punished together on the same ledge.[17] We are subsequently informed that, enlightened by the famous prophecy of the fourth *Eclogue,* Statius had converted to Christianity but that, out of fear of persecution, he had refrained from any public utterance of his religious beliefs, remaining to the end of his life a "secret Christian" and eschewing any reference to his Christian convictions in his poem, the *Thebaid,* only half of which had been completed at the time of his conversion.[18]

Since there are no traces anywhere in the literary tradition of Statius' prodigality—or avarice, as the case may be—nor for that matter of his pretended Christianity, one must assume that both details have been invented by Dante for some definite though as yet unknown purpose and would have to be accounted for in any final or reasonably complete interpretation of the pertinent passages.[19] It is likewise evident that, in the total absence of independent witnesses, any such interpretation will have to be drawn from the information supplied by the *Divine Comely* itself. Is there any way in which one could make some sense of Statius's mysterious prodigality?

The answer, as it happens, may not be as remote as the long and tortuous history of Dante scholarship would lead us to suspect. The little that is revealed about Statius in the *Divine Comedy* suggests that, while there is no real reason to believe that he was a prodigal or a spendthrift in the ordinary sense of the word, he had ostensibly been the victim of another, less common but not less important form of prodigality. As the author of an epic poem characterized among other things by its prolixity, he may be said to have been prodigal in words, a vice from which in time he attempted to cure himself, only to fall by reaction into the opposite vice of taciturnity. Just as Statius had been prodigal in words, so he became avaricious or thrifty in words.[20]

The suggestion, which may sound arbitrary at first hearing, becomes more plausible if we consider the possible connection between the avarice gratuitously imputed to Statius by Dante and his presumed hidden Christianity. It could well be that both fictions belong together and are meant to illumine each other. In refusing to profess his faith outwardly, Statius practiced what was known in the Middle Ages as the economy of truth. His avarice is reality identical with the "lukewarmness" (*tepidezza*) with which he reproaches himself in the same passage.[21] An ardent Christian would undoubtedly have been less fearful and more forthright in confessing his faith even at the risk of his life. By this cowardly subterfuge Statius managed to save himself but forfeited the opportunity of saving others. His position is the exact reverse of that assigned to Virgil, who, as one carrying his light behind him, instructed others but was unable to help himself.[22]

Even if, for the sake of argument, one were to grant the validity of the preceding interpretation, one might feel that little has been done to dispel the obscurity in which the whole incident is shrouded. What does it matter after all that Statius should have been a coward who demonstrated his lack of courage by purposely withholding the truth about his conversion to Christianity? His role in the *Divine Comedy* could still strike us as purely episodic and contribute nothing to our understanding either of the internal structure or the doctrinal content of the poem. There is more to the story, however. A moment's reflection will bring us closer to the reason that conceivably justifies the lofty position to which Statius, a relatively minor poet compared to Virgil, is elevated at this crucial juncture of Dante's voyage.

Statius's most obvious function is to serve, along with Virgil, as Dante's guide in the upper regions of Purgatory. His own role is similar to that which Virgil alone had fulfilled throughout the earlier part of the journey. But if such is the case, the composition of the poem, as has often been remarked, remains curiously asymmetrical. Given Dante's fondness for symmetry, one would normally expect a third epic poet to assume the role previously discharged by the other two poets once the threshold of Heaven has been reached. It is of course true that Beatrice will accompany Dante on the rest of his journey; but as a purely mythical figure who cannot by any stretch of the imagination be thought to belong in the same category as Virgil and Statius, she scarcely qualifies as the missing guide.[23] The key to the riddle is furnished in part by the positions which the three poets who travel together occupy in relation to one another and which Dante is always careful to note with the utmost precision. In the scenes that immediately follow the first encounter with Statius, both Virgil and Statius are shown leading the way and Dante, who is still in need of a guide, walks reverently behind them.[24] As they prepare to cross the wall of fire, the positions shift; Dante moves ahead of Statius and is portrayed comically as a goat between two shepherds, with Virgil in front and Statius bringing up the rear.[25] By the time we reach the end of Purgatory, we discover that without much fanfare Dante has suddenly taken the lead.[26] The third part of the *Divine Comedy,* it turns out, will not be without its own epic poet, who is none other than Dante himself. It is perhaps significant that at this point and only at this point is Dante referred to by name in the poem.[27]

In the light of these observations, and bearing in mind what was said earlier about Statius, we can at last address ourselves to the unresolved problem of the symbolic value attached to the three major poets. The simplest case is undoubtedly that of Virgil, the pagan poet who writes a pagan epic. The case of Statius is slightly more complex but no longer as bewildering as it once seemed to be, since on the basis of the literary device contrived by Dante he now stands for the Christian who writes a pagan epic. Dante's own case would appear to exhibit a simplicity analogous to that of Virgil, inasmuch as one immediately thinks of him as a Christian who sets out to write a Christian epic. By this simple procedure the symmetry which was originally thought to be wanting is restored and the three parts of the poem are adjusted to one another without any discernible lacuna. Or are they?

The only trouble with that explanation is that it again confronts us with an incomplete enumeration. One intriguing possibility has been tacitly passed over and thereby brought forcefully, if in a somewhat roundabout way, to our attention, namely, the hypothetical case of the pagan who writes a Christian epic. At this point the reader is thrust in the situation of having to examine the alternatives afresh. Since neither

Virgil's nor Statius's position is subject to revision, Dante's own status is cast in a rather more dubious light. For all we know, Statius's crypto-Christianity, which finds its rationale in the open hostility of the pagan rulers toward the new Faith, may have its parallel in the crypto-rationalism of Statius's medieval counterpart, who lived at a time when heretics and unbelievers had since become liable to the severe penalties once reserved for avowed Christians. It would be interesting indeed if Dante, the author of the most famous Christian poem ever written, was not himself a Christian.

CONDITIONAL CONCLUSIONS

Assuming that there is something to be said for such a supposition, one may be reluctant to take Dante's profession of Christian faith at face value. There is in any event a strange similarity in both content and mode between his work and those of the Islamic writers to whom he occasionally alludes. By steering a middle course between verbal prodigality and verbal avarice, the *Divine Comedy* displays a moderation which Statius, as depicted by Dante for purposes of illustration, had supposedly failed to achieve.[28] unlike Statius, Dante cannot be accused of having said too much or too little.[29] He neither completely reveals nor completely conceals his innermost thoughts and is thus able not only to save himself but to instruct others as well. If one takes the essence of Averroism to lie in the so-called double truth theory, which calls for the public acceptance and defense of divine revelation and at the same time its secret or implied subordination to philosophy, Dante may have been a better Averroist than many of the acknowledged Averroists of his day.

It was Vernani's merit to expose the fundamental ambiguity of Dante's position, at least as it affects the thesis of the *De monarchia,* and to denounce with remarkable perspicacity the specious character of the arguments by which Dante strives to establish the necessity of a world empire. One could perhaps go one step further and suggest that Dante himself was fully aware of the inconsistencies so aptly pointed out by his critic. In all likelihood, the idea of a universal monarchy appealed to him more as a kind of theoretical counterpoise to the universal authority of the Pope than as a proposal whose actual implementation could ever be seriously considered. The *Convivio* at any rate makes it clear beyond any reasonable doubt that for Dante the true emperor of the universe was reason itself and not Henry VII or any other temporal ruler on whom he may have pinned his hopes for the restoration of peace in his beloved land.[30] The value of the present argument is not weakened by the rejoinder that the teaching of the *Convivio* belongs to a rationalistic and soon to be transcended "middle phase" in Dante's career.[31] The objection would carry more weight if one could be sure that the surface teaching of the *Divine Comedy* was not partly intended as a cover for the extraordinarily bold statements encountered in his earlier works.[32]

But then, if Vernani was basically correct in his assessment of the *De monarchia,* why was his treatise ignored and silently rejected by his contemporaries? The reason, paradoxical as it sounds, is probably not that he was wrong but that he may have been right. He could not disclose as openly as he did Dante's true intention without simultaneously bringing to light the potential threat that it posed to Christian orthodoxy. Unfortunately, the Church could not afford an adversary of the stature of Dante. Vernani's reputation might have suffered less had he been either less perspicacious or more perspicacious. He had seen through Dante's veil, but not well enough to grasp the subtle lesson that the use of such a veil was intended to convey. Like Statius, whose "prodigality" he unwittingly imitated, he fully merited the purgatory to which his judges in their wisdom saw fit to consign him.

NOTES

1 Guido Vernani, *De reprobatione monarchiae,* ed. N. Matteini, *Il più antico oppositore politico di Dante: Guido Vernani da Rimini. Testo Critico del «De reprobatione monarchiae»* (Padova: CEMA, 1958), 97, 5. Editor's Note: "Dante and Averroism" originally appeared in *Actas del V Congreso Internacional de Filosofía Medieval,* vol. 2 (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1979), 739-46.

2 Averroes, *In Arist. de anima* III.1 (Venetiis: Apus Juntas, 1550), f. 164.

3 *Inferno* IV.144.

4 *Quaestio de aqua et terra* V and XXIII. The statement is ascribed by Dante to Averroes' commentary on the *De anima* but seems rather to be taken from Book VIII of his commentary on the *Physics.*

5 Ibid., XVIII. Cf. Averroes, commentary on the *Metaphysics* XII.18, cited by Dante as the *De substantia orbis.*

6 *Convivio* IV.13.

7 Ibid., IV.21.

8 Cf. N. Matteini, op. cit., 45-50, and the literature quoted in the footnotes. Matteini writes: “Ecco perchè senza considerare Dante nato con una cufietta tomistica in testa, bell‘e ricamata, non è dato a nessuno, che sia in buona fede, di considerarlo contro l’ortodossia cattolica...” (47-48).

9 Cf. Matteini, 7.

10 Cf. Étienne Gilson, *Dante et la philosophie,* 2nd ed. (Paris: J. Vrin, 1953), 168-72.

11 E.g., *De monarchia* III.16.

12 Cf. Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1952), 15.

13 See, inter alia, *De monarchia* I.1; *Inferno* IV.51, VI.113, X.19-21; *Purgatorio* XVIII.138-39.

14 For a clear, concise, and penetrating statement of the problem, cf. E. Moore, *Studies in Dante, First Series: Scripture and Classical Authors in Dante* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), 30-34. According to Moore, “Dante’s treatment of Statius constitutes one of the most singular problems of the *Divina Commedia.* We are surprised at his enthusiastic, and, as it appears to us, somewhat extravagant admiration of a poet whose prolix and often inflated style is the very antipodes of his own” (30).

15 Ibid., 33: “The conspicuous pan assigned to him (Statius)...only surpassed in importance by the parts played in the action of the poem by Beatrice and Virgil naturally disposes us to expect some definite piece of symbolism.”

16 *Purgatorio* XXI.82ff.

17 Ibid., XXII.19ff.

18 Ibid., XXII.55ff.

19 Cf. J. Pépin, *Dante et le problème* de *l‘allégorie* (Montréal: Institut d’Études Médiévales; Paris: Librarie J. Vrin, 1970), 104, n. 9: “Le christianisme de Stace et l‘influence exercée à cet égard par Virgile sont des inventions de Dante, dont on ne voit guère la raison.”

20 *Purgatorio* XXII.49-54.

21 Ibid., XXII.92.

22 Ibid., XXII.67-69.

23 See, for example, the remarks by E. Gilson, op. cit., 291, n. 2.

24 *Purgatorio* XXII.127, XXIV.143-44.

25 Ibid., XXVII.46-48; 85-86.

26 Ibid., XXVIII.82 and 145.

27 Ibid., XXX.55.

28 Ibid., XXII.35.

29 Cf. *Inferno* X.19-21.

30 *Convivio* II.16.

31 Cf. Francis Fergusson, *Dante* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 145.

32 Cf. *Inferno* IX.10-12.

III

BIBLICAL FAITH AND MODERN PHILOSOPHY

10

THE NEW MORAL THEOLOGY: GENESIS AND PRESENT STATE

For several years now, Catholic moral theology has been under constant and severe fire from many different quarters, both in inner and in outer Catholic space.[1] The case against this theology may be stated briefly as follows. If we compare a typical manual of moral theology with the moral teaching of the Gospel, we find glaring discrepancies between them not only in presentation, which is to be expected, but in tone and spirit. The teaching of the manual is likely to appear as hardly more than an elaborate commentary on a series of rigid "do's" and "don'ts" by which man is required to abide, whether he understands them or not, or at best as a more or less christianized version of Greek ethics. Our only choice is between a moral theology that is essentially static, uninspiring, and in many instances out of step with the world in which we live, and one that is more intelligible perhaps, but altogether too rational, not to say rationalistic. In either case, we are far from the New Testament ideal of a life in which man, who has been gifted with divine life, enjoys the perfect freedom of a son of God and strives to be perfect just as his heavenly Father is perfect (cf. Matt. 5:48).

The discontent arising from this situation has led to various attempts aimed at renovating the standard presentation of moral theology. Perhaps the most important recent work on the subject, and, at any rate, the only one thus far to integrate and synthesize the results of all the research accomplished in this field is Father Bernard Haring's book, *The Law of Christ*.[2] Father Häring himself has done more than anyone else to bring the new movement to the attention of a large segment of the lay population through his articles and his lectures in various countries, including our own. His book has enjoyed a phenomenal success in Europe. The French edition in 1960 brought the total number of copies in print up to 50,000. This was before the translation into English of the first volume. Just recently, the assembly of French bishops considered the possibility of adopting the *Law of Christ* as a textbook in their seminaries. The proposal was finally rejected on the grounds that the work was not sufficiently didactic for this purpose; but the fact that such a proposal should have been made and discussed is already an indication of the respect that the book commands in certain high places.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Before proceeding to an analysis of this so-called new moral theology, we should note two things. First, the renewal advocated by Father Haring and numerous other scholars is not just an *adaptation* of the unchanging principles of moral science to the rapidly changing circumstances of our time. Such an adaptation is always necessary, and it is particularly urgent today in view of the complex problems with which we have suddenly become faced. One has only to think here of such questions as modern business and medical ethics, nuclear warfare, interracial issues, the population explosion, and the like, for which no provision was made in the older manuals. Moral theology is in constant need of being rewritten and brought up to date. Even the more perfect manual, by the fact that it deals concretely with problems of human conduct, is doomed in part to obsolescence. It is true that we are perhaps more keenly aware than our predecessors of the amazing variety and relativity of human customs and configurations, and hence of the need for greater flexibility in our discussion of moral matters. But this realization was never absent from moral theology. The proof is that since the Middle Ages there has been a constant and steadily increasing flow of moral theology books. The nineteenth-century French writer who predicted that the next deluge would be not water but ink could very well have been thinking of moral theology.

Recent developments may have prompted us to intensify our efforts at adaptation, but they do not necessarily require a radical transformation of the existing moral theology. In any event, adaptation is not the keynote or the specific contribution of the new moral theology. Secondly, the new moral theology is not just an attempt to incorporate into the old synthesis the valid finding of the modern psychological and social sciences. To the degree to which these sciences have extended our knowledge of the hidden

wellsprings of human behavior, they have made possible a more discerning application of our principles to the problems of individuals or of groups. Yet one could conceivably make room for the new knowledge supplied by modern science within the traditional framework of moral theology without substantially altering that framework. Such is not the primary aim of the new moral theologians. Some of these theologians have sought to make use of these new materials in their works and others have shown themselves more reluctant to do so. What all of them demand is not, first and foremost, "the addition of a great deal of new matter to moral theology, but a *new atmosphere.*"[3]

If the new moral theology is neither a concerted effort to adapt the traditional teaching of the Church to the needs of our time, nor an attempt to broaden the scope of moral theology by the adjunction of new elements, what is it? More precisely, what is the new *approach,* or new *climate,* or new *spirit* that contemporary theologians are striving to introduce or to restore, if it should turn out to be something that we have lost? Since this new approach is clearly a reaction of same sort, it is impossible to understand it fully without some knowledge of the moral theology against which it purports to react. Let us, then, begin by sketching briefly the development and the essential features of the moral theology that has come to be regarded as traditional in modern times.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MORAL THEOLOGY

Moral theology in the form in which we know it today dates back to the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century. The most important event of that period from our point of view is the emergence of an independent moral theology in which all or most of the characteristics of present-day moral theology come together for the first time. Prior to that date, what we call moral theology existed as part of a larger whole, from the other parts of which it was not separated by clean lines of demarcation. This is especially true of patristic thought in general, and it is also true of the great scholastic theologians. There are relatively few considerations pertaining to morals in the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard; but even in a work like the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas, where we find the first truly scientific study of human conduct from a theological point of view, the part that corresponds roughly to our moral theology is firmly imbedded in the overall structure of a single and highly unified treatise. It is significant that the expression "moral theology" does not occur anywhere in St. Thomas. The first author to publish a work under that title appears to have been St. Antonine in the fifteenth century. It is equally worthy of note that the word "morality," which we take for granted, is a comparatively recent invention, for which there is no exact equivalent in ancient or medieval thought. In any case, we find, ca. 1600, something which did not exist before that time and which suddenly takes on a massive importance, namely, a "moral theology," as opposed to what had been simply a part of theology dealing with morals.

If moral theology did not exist as a separate entity before the seventeenth century, it was nevertheless prepared and foreshadowed by two earlier developments. We have, on the one hand, in the thirteenth century, an intensification of pastoral work among the bulk of the Christian population and the consequent need for clear and concise instructions on how to hear confessions. This need became more pressing, it seems, when the Fourth Lateran Council imposed on all the faithful who had reached the age of reason the obligation of confessing their sins at least once a year. Manuals were written for the benefit of priests who were now compelled to discharge a duty for which very often they were not sufficiently prepared. These manuals were provided for the most part by Franciscans and Dominicans, who had been especially entrusted with this ministry. They were variously called *Summa Confessorum, Summa de Poenitentia, Summa Casuum,* or *Summa de Peccatis.* All these titles are indicative of the essentially practical character of the works in question. The most illustrious representative of this genre was St. Raymond of Pennafort.

Wholly independently of this movement and on an altogether different plane, we have, also in the thirteenth century, various attempts at a methodical and specifically Christian presentation of human action and behavior. The great monument of this scientific activity is, of course, the second part of St. Thomas' *Summa Theologiae.* The main impulse in this case was provided by Aristotle. Books I-III of the *Nicomachean Ethics* had been known and utilized in the West since the beginning of the thirteenth century, and the remaining books since about the middle of that century. It is hardly necessary to stress the tremendous historical importance of this development. Its influence, however, will not be felt on a large scale until much later. The *Sentences* of Peter Lombard continued to be used as the basic theological text until the sixteenth century. As for the *summae poenitentiales,* they increased in number and volume but remained otherwise substantially unaltered. In the meantime, the groundwork had been laid for the new type of moral theology that makes its appearance during the second half of the sixteenth century.

One of the key roles in this change was played by the Spanish Dominican, Francis of Vittoria. As a young student in Paris, Vittoria had studied Aristotle and St. Thomas under the supervision of his teacher, the

Belgian Peter Crockaert. Together they edited the second part of Thomas' *Summa.* Upon being named professor of theology at the University of Salamanca, Vittoria substituted the *Summa* for the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard as a textbook. A new trend was thus inaugurated which was later followed by the Jesuits of the Roman College; and this, in turn, led to a flowering of moral theology which expressed itself in the form of commentaries on the *Summa Theologiae.* Among the most famous names linked to this development are those of Gregory of Valentia, Vasquez, and Suarez.

As a result of this scientific activity and under its influence, the *summae poenitentiales* themselves underwent a profound change and eventually took on another form, which is essentially that of our own moral theology. One could say that the new moral theology of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is an attempt to fuse the two currents which we have just described and which had led separate existences up to that time. The need for practical guidance in the exercise of the ministry of the sacraments, and particularly of penance, continued to be felt; but it also became apparent that the practical solutions contained in the old manuals should be based on the general principles governing human activity. The new moral theologies of that period, or the *Institutiones Morales,* as they were most commonly called, sought to satisfy both of these needs. Unlike their predecessors, these manuals were not just works of a strictly practical nature, intended to complement the abstract teaching of scientific theology, but complete treatises in their own right, which absorbed both the matter of the *summae de casibus* and that of the scientific treatises in the form of principles that are immediately applicable to individual cases. The older *summae* were comparatively short and essentially concrete repertories, disposed in most cases according to alphabetical order. Instead of that, we now find a systematic, comprehensive, and self-contained treatment of moral matters. Moral theology becomes a specialty, a discipline among other theological disciplines, with its own teachers and specialists, and its own special place in the curriculum.

The *Institutiones Morales* by the Jesuit John Azor, first published in 1600, may be regarded as the prototype of the new genre. Azor's book will be followed by many others, the most popular of which was undoubtedly Hermann Busenbaum's *Medulla Theologiae Moralis* a half century later. The *Medulla* owes its notoriety in part to the fact that it was twice condemned by the Parliament of Paris because one of its principles allegedly tended to undermine the authority of the king.[4] Apart from this somewhat accidental consideration, however, the book proved to be enormously successful. There were forty editions of it during the author's own lifetime and at least one hundred and fifty other editions between 1670 and 1770. A number of commentaries were written on it by famous people, including St. Alphonsus and Ballerini. Volume I of Busenbaum's treatise begins with a chapter on conscience and another on the commandments in general. This is followed by a series of chapters on the precepts relating to Faith, Hope, and Charity, and on the Decalogue, and finally by a chapter on sin. Volume II is devoted to a study of the sacraments from a juridical and canonical point of view. For reasons that remain mysterious to this day, the author managed to escape Pascal's wrath. Despite certain laxist leanings, he is not included in the long list of moral theologians who come in for a sound thrashing in the *Provincial Letters.* At any rate, we have here a prime example of what moral theology will be throughout that whole period and, with certain modifications and improvements, down to our own time.

ASSESSING THE "OLD" MORAL THEOLOGY

It is fashionable today to scoff at this moral theology and to heap all sorts of insults on the heads of its promoters. Lest we be accused of merely yielding to fashion or of engaging in the ungentlemanly sport of whipping dead horses, we should be careful not to underestimate its merits. Not the least of these merits is a keen awareness of the reality of sin and a marvelous sensitivity to all the shades and nuances of sin. Such qualities are not negligible in an age that has been known to minimize the importance of these notions. Next to those and other assets, however, we find certain liabilities, which it would be equally dangerous to overlook. The most prominent of these liabilities may be summed up under four heads.

The first is precisely the predominant concern with sin, the various categories of sin, and their respective degrees of malice, to the neglect of the more positive side of Christian life. This concern is readily understandable in the light of the primary intention of these manuals, which was to be of immediate use to priests and confessors. But by the same token they tended to degenerate into a kind of catalogue *raisonné* of all the misdeeds of which the evil heart of man is capable, from more or less harmless peccadilloes to the most horrendous crimes. As a result, Christian life no longer appeared as a noble pursuit to which man's best efforts should be dedicated and was seen in the negative light of a series of acts to be avoided under pain of mortal sin and of hell. The highest goal of this life was never denied, but its existence became known only indirectly, through the long, dark shadow that was thus projected on human life and behavior.

This emphasis on sin led, in turn, to what is usually described as a legalistic or juridical approach to the

problems of human conduct. Since sin is the transgression of a law or norm, the preferred framework of moral theology was that of the Ten Commandments, to which were added the commandments of the Church and such other prescriptions as were deemed necessary. Christian life was presented in terms of law rather than in terms of love and came to be looked upon as mere compliance with an increasingly long list of moral imperatives, mostly negative, the reasons for which were not always clearly perceived, now that insufficient attention was paid to their dogmatic foundation. In the eyes of many people, including Catholics themselves, a good Catholic was a man who went to Mass on Sunday, performed his Easter duties, did not eat meat on Friday, and did not swear, steal, kill, or lie.

Thirdly, we observe at the same time in these manuals a general tendency to minimize the requirements of Christian life. Instead of looking at that life from above as a progressive and unending development of the divine life in man, moral theology looked at it from below, as the minimum requirement that must be met if that life is to be maintained. This tendency shows up in a variety of ways, the most famous of which is casuistry—the art of reasoning about concrete cases, but also, and all too often perhaps, a kind of art of getting into heaven by the skin of one's teeth. To this day, anyone who has studied for the priesthood and engaged in the time-hallowed practice of solving "cases of conscience" remembers the spirit in which these amicable jousts were, and still are, conducted. The accepted procedure consisted in bringing the right principles to bear on each case and in providing a solution with the help of opinions collected from a wide range of moral theologians representing every position from the broadest to the narrowest.

The honors went to the person who could quote a principle or an author exonerating the penitent of all guilt. The moral theologian had literally become the man who takes away the sins of the world.[5] The ideal of Christian perfection survived among a small group of privileged souls or "mystics," but its study ceased to be the property of the moral theologian and was subsequently relegated to special courses in ascetical and mystical theology. The course in spiritual or mystical theology is still part of the seminary curriculum today. It is usually a one-hour course, often reserved for fourth-year men and intended as a kind of immediate preparation for the reception of major orders.

Lastly, the moral theology of the modern period is characterized by a general disregard for the social or corporate dimension of Christian morality. It focuses its attention almost exclusively on the relation between God and the individual and thereby tends to become a technique of individual salvation. Christians, who were once distinguished from other groups by their love of their fellow men, became notorious for their lack of interest in others. The great, the tormenting question for most of them was: "How can I save my soul?" "Christian egoism" became one of the slogans of the anti-Christian propaganda during the nineteenth century. In elaborating his social gospel, Auguste Comte coined the word "altruism," in a deliberate effort to avoid the word "charity" and its selfish connotations.[6]

All four of the traits just mentioned contrast sharply with the moral teaching of the New Testament, its ideal of perfection, and its obsession with the unity of all men in Christ. And they are all indicative of the general decline in the quality of moral studies during this period.

This decline is usually imputed to the ignorance which often prevailed among Catholics at the time of the Reformation and of the Counter-Reformation which necessitated a catechetic simplification of the doctrines of the Faith. Nor was this illiteracy confined to the laity. There were signs of appalling ignorance among the clergy as well. One of St. Vincent de Paul's recent biographers tells us that a lady once complained to the saint that the country priest to whom she had gone to confession had recited a "Hail Mary" instead of the formula of absolution. Vincent de Paul proceeded to write the formula on a piece of paper and handed it to the lady, with the recommendation that she show it to future confessors, whenever it became apparent that they did not know it. To aggravate matters, the Council of Trent had laid down precise rules relative to the detailed confession of sins. These disciplinary measures made it all the more imperative for priests engaged in pastoral work to become acquainted with these sins and all the species thereof.

The widespread ignorance among priests and laymen, however, constitutes at best only a partial explanation of the fate of moral theology during that period. Even if we assume that a large portion of the clergy were insufficiently educated, there was nothing to prevent the moral theologian from effecting an intelligent compromise between what is most desirable in itself and what the circumstances permit, and from reverting to a more satisfactory presentation of his subject matter once conditions had become more favorable. The fact that no effort was made to restore moral theology to its original state suggests that other causes were at play. On a deeper level, the moral theology that we have been describing betrays the influence of the new ethical and political theories which make their appearance at that time and which represent a radical departure from all earlier (i.e., classical and medieval) thought. If we pause for a moment to examine these theories, we shall find in them the same juridical, minimalist, and individualistic

tendencies already observed in the contemporary moral theology.

The man who was chiefly responsible for this intellectual revolution was Machiavelli. Machiavelli's critique of classical or traditional philosophy may be summarized as follows. Classical political philosophy studies human behavior in the light of the highest human possibilities or the highest goals that man may choose, i.e., in the light of virtue; and it claims to be able to show the way to these goals. It culminates in a discussion of the best life and, on the political level, of the "best regime," as it was formerly called, that is to say, the type of rule that is most conducive to the best life. In so doing, it is compelled to speak about an ideal that is rarely, if ever, seen among men and whose actualization is dependent upon the unlikely confluence of an untold number of auspicious circumstances. Such a philosophy is radically and inherently defective for the simple reason that it fails to take into account the human, all too human character of man's behavior. By prescribing goals that are unattainable for all men most of the time and for most men all the time, it makes impossible and hence unreasonable demands on human nature. To paraphrase an early disciple of Machiavelli, its discourses are like the stars, which give little light because they are so high.[7] It is hardly surprising then that it should have failed signally in its efforts to make men better. Any philosophy that prescribes unfulfillable duties is unrealistic and finally untenable. It thus becomes necessary to reformulate or redefine the horizon within which political thought would henceforth take place.

The new political philosophy was in its deepest aspirations an attempt to provide adequate guidance in human affairs. It hoped to succeed by deliberately lowering its sights. It ceased to take its bearings by man's highest excellences and focused its attention on what men actually do. In this manner it broke in the highest degree with the ancient tradition.[8]

Machiavelli's statements on these matters need to be interpreted cautiously. By referring to what men actually do or have done rather than to what they ought to do, Machiavelli is not suggesting that what men actually do is what they ought to do. Men do many different things, some of which are better or worse than others. Like his predecessors, Machiavelli thinks that there are certain things that ought to be done and others omitted. The sole difference concerns the "ought." Machiavelli's "ought" is radically different from the "ought" of the classical philosophers. It is lower. Because Machiavelli's ideal is more accessible to the bulk of humanity, its chances of success are vastly increased. The good society in the new sense is possible always and everywhere. The element of chance is greatly reduced, if not altogether overcome. Machiavelli endeavored to provide effective political guidance by lowering the standards of human action. In order to bring about this fundamental change in the orientation of moral thought, he was forced to take a decisive step affecting the status of wisdom. This step consisted in questioning the supremacy of wisdom. With Machiavelli, wisdom ceases for the first time to be a major theme of political philosophy. The virtue advocated by Machiavelli has its source solely in the needs of society and not in those of the soul or of the mind.

Machiavelli's views exerted a profound influence on the development of political thought; but they do not by themselves account for every aspect of that thought. The revolting character of some of these views led to their subsequent modification and to the introduction of new and important elements into the original scheme. One of the most important of these elements will come to light if we turn for a moment to another prominent modern political thinker, John Locke. Perhaps the simplest way to understand Locke's position is to compare it once again to that of the classical philosophers. For classical thought as a whole, there is no pre-established or pre-existing harmony between the individual and society or between self-interest and the common interest. It may be to the advantage of a society that the bulk of its citizenry should believe in this harmony, but the truth of the matter is that if such a harmony is going to exist at all, something will be needed to bring it about. That something is moral virtue; and moral virtue presupposes a *conversion* on man's part from the pre-moral, if not amoral, concern with worldly goods to the concern with the goodness of the soul. Only through such a conversion does the perfection of the individual become identical with that of the citizen. Locke, on the other hand, takes it for granted that there is a previous harmony between self-interest and public interest. Since self-interest means, politically at any rate, the acquisition and preservation of property, we are led to the view that acquisitiveness and, ultimately, unlimited acquisitiveness is in harmony with public interest. Strictly speaking, moral virtue is no longer necessary. Two things are sufficient to bring about the desired end: enlightenment and positive law. Men must simply come to understand that it is in their interest to abide by the law. They will avoid injustice if only it can be made unprofitable. Honesty is the best policy and nothing more. The conversion to virtue as something choice-worthy for its own sake ceases to be necessary and is replaced by the mere transition, based on calculation, between unenlightened and enlightened self-interest. The actualization of a desirable social order is thus secured without any recourse to genuine virtue. There is no need for man to be concerned with the common good, which is procured automatically by the mere fact that he pursues his own interest.

For all practical purposes, vulgar or instrumental virtue is all that is necessary. One can henceforth enjoy the benefits of virtue without the effort of virtue.

Locke succeeded in providing the most elegant modern solution to the crucial problem of society. It is in its Lockian form that the revolution initiated by Machiavelli finally triumphed. The very elegance of Locke's solution was a decisive factor in its success. Whatever its deficiencies—and these deficiencies are no doubt more apparent to us than they were to Locke's contemporaries—it became the most popular political theory of the modern period.

The little that we have said concerning the development of modern ethical and political thought does not exhaust the content of that thought. It does, nevertheless, give us an inkling of the entirely new orientation of moral thought and it suggests a striking parallel between the most influential secular and Christian writers of that time. On both sides we find a practical thought detached from speculative wisdom, if not actually predicated on the denial of that wisdom. We find the same obsession with positive law and, allied to this, a legalistic view of human conduct and activity. We notice the same lack of genuine understanding of the meaning of conversion and of subsequent organic spiritual growth through the development of the virtues. We encounter, finally, the same overall neglect of the social orientation of human life and endeavor. One basic premise underlies this whole trend: a determination on the part of both groups to place the moral life on a low but solid footing in the hope of attaining more certain, if less spectacular, results.

Such, in barest outline, was the situation from the end of the sixteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the conflict between laxists and rigorists broke out and raged for a century or so. But this noisy dispute did not alter basically the character of contemporary moral teaching. However justified the rigorists may have been in reacting against the abuses of their adversaries, they still engaged in battle on the same ground as they. One does not transcend the legalistic point of view by merely tightening the prescriptions of the law or by enforcing these prescriptions more stringently. The issue was finally settled, if not to everybody's satisfaction, at least to the extent to which it can be settled, by St. Alphonsus.[9] Alphonsus was the greatest moral theologian of that period; but he was no innovator. What characterizes him is rather the breadth of his information and the soundness, moderation, and finesse of his judgment. By steering a middle course between the extremes of laxism and rigorism, he carried to its perfection and enshrined the moral theology that will henceforth be regarded as traditional in the Catholic fold. He thus appears as the savior of the old moral theology rather than as the prophet of the new one. We shall have to wait another fifty years before we encounter a new beginning.

The first signs of this new beginning came at the start of the nineteenth century under the influence of Romanticism. For the first time in many years, the moral theologian momentarily turned his eyes away from the sins of the world and concentrated for a change on the sins of his theology. This renewal will be for the most part the work of German theologians and is really only one important aspect among many of the sudden flowering of Catholic scholarship in Germany at that time. In the domain of morals, the pioneers were J.M. Sailer and J.B. Hirscher. The ideas propounded by both of these theologians stirred up considerable controversy but otherwise had little effect at that early date outside of Germany and even outside a small group of disciples and followers. Sporadic efforts will be made throughout the remainder of the century to keep the new ideas alive, apparently without creating a general movement.

In a remarkable article entitled, "Moral Theology at the End of the Nineteenth Century," Thomas Bouquillon launched another vibrant appeal for the reform of moral theology.[10] Bouquillon's own manual, however, continues to reflect faithfully the spirit that he so roundly denounced in his article. Ten years later, in 1909, Thomas Slater could write: "Moral theology is still what St. Alphonsus left it. There is general agreement in the schools a common doctrine which all accept; it only remains to apply this to the social and political conditions which we see growing up around us."[11] Only in the past twenty or twenty-five years has the interest stimulated by the nineteenth century precursors passed beyond the narrow circle of specialists and seeped down to other layers of Christian society.[12]

PROFILE OF THE NEW MORAL THEOLOGY

Very briefly, what are the characteristics of the new moral theology? In contradistinction to the older manuals, the recent works attempt to build a moral theology around the notion of love and not around that of law. This is plainly suggested by the titles of such works as those of Gilleman, *The Primacy of Charity,* and of Häring, *The Law of Christ,* by which is meant, of course, the law of love or the "new law" inscribed in the hearts of men. Gilleman finds the theological basis for his position in the Thomistic teaching on charity as the form of all the other virtues.[13] In this view, the new people of God brought into existence by the glorified Christ is no longer defined by the "Law," as had been the case with the Jewish people under the

Old Economy. The Law ceases to be the criterium of man's faithfulness to the Covenant and the role that it once played in men's lives is henceforth assumed by an internal norm, which is that of the Spirit. The true spirit which animates Christian life, and which the contemporary moral theologian strives to convey, is summed up in Saint Augustine's often quoted dictum, *Ama et quod vis fac,* "Love and do what you will," the implication being that the person who is motivated by the love of God will do nothing that is contrary to the love or law of God. It may be interesting to note that Augustine's liberating aphorism was originally intended to justify the massive repressions undertaken against the Donatist party. The work in which it occurs[14] was written in 415 at the height of the Donatist controversy. By that time the Donatists had become very numerous in North Africa. They were a particularly noisy and boisterous group and actually presented a threat to the peace. Augustine first recommended that they be treated with gentleness and tolerance. This policy apparently failed to achieve its intended result and, at the request of his disciples, who were pressing for more vigorous action, Augustine finally consented to the use of force. The gist of his answer was: Do with the Donatists what you will; beat them up if you have to, provided you love them. Be that as it may, the common interpretation of this famous maxim retains its full value: in a larger context, Augustine's words do express in striking fashion the idea that Christian life is not just a matter of conforming to a set of inflexible rules imposed from without but a response of the whole person to the bounteous love of God.

The pre-eminence thus accorded to charity does not in any way detract from the dignity of the law or diminish its importance in everyday life. It merely places that law in its true perspective by showing it as a statement of the basic requirements of love. The commandments are not liquidated; they are rather given their proper support in the love which originally dictated them and by which they are ultimately justified. The essential difference is again explained by St. Augustine in his commentary on Psalm 1: "It is one thing to be *within* the law, and another to be *under* the law, whereas the man who is under the law is *made* to act according to the law. The first man is a free man, the other a slave. In like manner, the law that is written and imposed on the slave is one thing, and the law seen by the mind of him who does not need the written text is another."[15]

The God-given love of the Christian presupposes a fundamental reorientation of the whole personality toward God; it requires a conversion in the true sense of the word. The notion of conversion, which had hitherto remained inconspicuous or even totally absent from most textbooks, regains a position of prominence within the general structure of moral theology. There is a long and, in the eyes of the author, very important section on the theme of conversion in Haring's *Law of Christ.*

Conversion, it goes without saying, is only the beginning of the new life in Christ. It does not express fully the Christian ideal of perfection but only the first step in the direction of that ideal. Hence we come to another notion which is absolutely central and which pervades the entire treatment of moral matters, namely, the notion that Christian life is not something static but rather a dynamic condition implying continuous and incessant growth in Christ. The study of Christian perfection ceases to be a sidelight or an annex of moral theology and becomes its foremost preoccupation. The task of setting forth the full requirements of the Christian ideal takes precedence over that of establishing clear and definite boundaries between what is lawful and what is forbidden. Christian life in its entirety is illumined by its summit—a summit which is rarely attained, but which is nevertheless capable of mobilizing all of man's energies and resources and which lends true Christian dignity and grandeur to the whole structure.

Finally, this perfection is viewed, not as a solitary venture in which each man is engaged for his own sake and independently of everyone else, but as a typically communal endeavor in which all men are united and form one body in Christ. The forgotten social dimension of Christianity thus receives once again its full significance.

INFLUENCES ON THE NEW MORAL THEOLOGY

The new climate in which moral studies are being pursued is the result of many factors all working together toward the same goal. The three most often mentioned[16] are, first, the renewal of Scripture studies in our time. This return to the sacred text has communicated to a rapidly increasing number of Catholics a taste for the written word of God and has made possible a direct contact with that great fountainhead of Christian life and thought. A more extensive use of Scripture was already visible in the German writers of the beginning of the nineteenth century and particularly in the works of Hirscher. Little needs to be added here to all that has been said elsewhere about this new and most promising development within Catholicism.

Secondly, one should mention the rediscovery of the great scholastic theologians and especially of

Thomas Aquinas, whose study was enjoined on all Catholic students of theology by Leo XIII in 1878. It suffices to recall that Aquinas does not divorce moral theology from dogma and that his treatment of human conduct culminates in a discussion of the virtues rather than of the commandments. This has helped to restore the unity of theology and to give a more positive orientation to the part of that science which deals with morals.

The third great contributing factor has been the rebirth of patristic studies. Such was the vitality of these studies in Europe during the immediate pre- and post-war periods that for a moment it seemed as if one's whole dignity as a theologian was dependent upon his being a patristic scholar. Many of the most prominent names in modern Catholic theology were teachers of patristics or men well-known for their work in that field. The enormously successful *Sources chrétiennes* series in France is only one indication of the renewed interest in the writers of Christian antiquity even among the laity. The great monastic and spiritual writers particularly, some of whom were largely unknown in the West during the Middle Ages, were instrumental in the recovery of a more genuinely Christian view of man and the world. This contact with early Christian literature suddenly opened up a vision of a lost world in which the manifold riches of the Christian mystery unfolded harmoniously, without any hiatus, and without being scattered into a multiplicity of individual and competing specialisms. The great concern of these writers with the positive term of the Incarnation—man's deification—rather than with sin primarily, their emphasis on the ecclesial or collective aspect of the history of salvation, their doctrine of the return to Eden, and their conception of Christian life not only as an *extasis,* or going out of oneself, but as an *epectasis* or perpetual transcending of oneself in the direction of an ever more perfect Godlikeness, all pointed to a view that stood in sharp contrast with the one to which certain more recent theologies had accustomed us.[17]

As was the case with the older moral theology, however, the new developments in Christian thought have found a dangerous but powerful ally in contemporary philosophic speculation. The most popular form of that philosophy at the present time is existentialism and its greatest source Friedrich Nietzsche.[18] There are, needless to say, profound differences between Nietzschean and Christian thought and one could even view Nietzsche's whole endeavor as an attempt to purge modern atheism of its last remnants of Christianity. These differences notwithstanding, it is not too difficult to see how, by its extreme valuation of life and action, the existentialist outlook has seemed particularly appealing to Catholic theologians. So powerful was its attraction for some of these theologians that the ecclesiastical authority has felt obliged to issue severe warnings against the extremes of subjectivism and situationalism into which it appeared to have led them.[19] But even without reducing man's moral life to a series of purely demonic decisions wholly beyond rational argument, one may still feel that it is possible to derive some benefit from the intuitions of existentialism. This much is certain: modern existential thought has proved to be one of the most clearly recognizable factors in the contemporary theologian's eagerness to stress the dynamic and affective quality of orthodox Christian morality.

ASSESSING THE NEW MORAL THEOLOGY

The new moral theology is, to a limited extent at least, a reaction against the moral theology of the post-Tridentine period. It recognizes the merits of this theology and it does not wish to sacrifice any of these merits. But it is equally sensitive to its shortcomings and eager to remedy them. Since this new moral theology is still largely in a state of flux, it would be difficult to evaluate it with any degree of finality. We have spoken of it as if it were a homogeneous whole and we have deliberately overlooked the sharp differences that sometimes occur among some of its leading representatives. Upon closer examination, we find that this whole is by no means a monolithic structure. There is as yet, for example, no universal agreement concerning the central or pivotal concept around which moral theology should be organized. At least three such concepts have currency today: charity (Gilleman), the imitation of Christ (Tillmann and his disciples), and responsibility (Haring). Hirscher had already proposed a fourth: the kingdom of God. The newness of many of the ideas proposed and the still unfinished character of the presentation were bound to arouse some opposition. The new theologians themselves, it should be added, have not only welcomed but encouraged constructive comments on their work. Without entering into innumerable points of detail, one could say that there are three main counts on which the new moral theology is open to criticism.

First, the terminology used by these theologians (I refer especially to the more recent ones) is often borrowed from contemporary philosophy, and even when it avoids jargon, it remains slightly ambiguous and misleading. This is the case with such terms as "historicity," "value," "responsibility," "self-realization," "aesthetics," "creativity," to mention only a few common ones. These words have a very definite source and their meaning is in many instances fully intelligible within the context of the philosophy to which they originally belonged. Even once they have been fumigated, they retain something of their initial flavor. It is

not sufficient to disavow the philosophy behind these words in order to strip them of all their subtle overtones and undertones. Oddly enough, the philosophers themselves are often more sensitive to this problem than the average Catholic theologian. In the words of one of these philosophers, "The use of a special 'philosophical language' commits the user, possibly even against his will, to accepting the philosophical doctrines which it has been designed to express, so that these doctrines are surreptitiously and dogmatically foisted upon every disputant who will consent to use the language."[20] The same objection could be raised against the use of Greek philosophical terms by the Church Fathers and the scholastics. But the fact remains that the terminology of Greek philosophy does not have the same abstract character as that of recent philosophy and is more readily understandable in terms of experiences that are accessible to all men. The language of Aristotle is not unlike that of a fairy tale by comparison with that of Heidegger, to cite a typical example. In the final analysis, the advantage would seem to lie with the user of common speech.

A second series of criticisms centers on the mode of procedure or order according to which the matter of moral theology should be treated. Everybody agrees that an order based on the Ten Commandments is wholly inadequate for a scientific treatise. But many of the new theologians are also openly critical of the order observed by St. Thomas. In an article that stimulated some discussion when it was published in 1949 the late Dom O. Lottin had already denounced this order as obsolete and questioned its usefulness today.[21] Not everyone is convinced, however, that the procedure adopted or recommended by these theologians is any better than the one they reject. Haring's own work seems particularly vulnerable on this point. Several critics have called attention to a certain arbitrariness in the order of the sections and in the distribution of the subject matter within each section. As a result, some parts of the book were transposed and rearranged in the French edition and connectives were added for the sake of clarity. Even with these improvements, the presentation remains somewhat chaotic and at times repetitious. As far as I know, no explanation is offered for the absence of a thematic discussion of grace, and there is doubt whether the decision to study the moral virtues before the theological is conducive to a better understanding of either group.

The problem of the mode of procedure is, in any event, directly related to the more fundamental issue of the general principles, or, as Haring calls them, the "essential concepts" of moral theology. Haring's key concepts are those of "call" and "response," which in the present context are obviously taken to mean God's call and man's response. The choice of this starting point is dictated by the author's understanding of Christian life in terms of an interpersonal relationship between God and man, and it leads to an articulation of moral philosophy along lines that may be described roughly as those of personalism, as P. Delhaye has rightly pointed out in his preface to the French edition of the *Law of Christ*. Häring's sympathy with the position is linked to, and corroborated by, his criticism of Aristotelian and Thomistic eudemonism in the first part of his book. The particularly dynamic quality of such a view is apparent even at a superficial reading. Rather than being faced with a series of abstract definitions or of purely static categories, one is immediately presented with different types of vital "responses," the most basic of which are sin, the negative response, and conversion, the positive response.

This approach to the scientific study of human activity is, of course, neither patristic nor medieval but typically modern. It is true that the Church Fathers are sometimes interpreted in that sense today and that every so often writers such as Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, or Maximus turn up in Heideggerian garb. But to interpret the Fathers in that light is surely not to understand them as they understood themselves. The fact that Haring should prefer a different approach from that of the classics does not mean that he is automatically wrong. It does compel us, however, to examine the relative merits of these two irreducible positions; and it also means that, even if we should finally decide in favor of the modern position, sooner or later we shall have to face the enormous theoretical and practical difficulties to which it is exposed. One cannot help wondering whether, by rejecting eudemonism or, differently stated, by refusing to base his study of human behavior on a previous analysis of man's perfection or natural end, an author can still do justice to the intellectual or objective component of Christian morality.[22] Some critics obviously feel that this rational element is not sufficiently safeguarded in the modern scheme. It is no mere accident that there are but few definitions in Haring's book and that even these remain somewhat vague and indeterminate. If, indeed, much of the basic intelligibility of Christian ethics has been forfeited in the process of revitalization, the price that one is required to pay for the advantages gained on this sector may prove to be truly exorbitant.

Whatever the value of these criticisms, they should not cause us to forget the very impressive accomplishments of the new theology. This theology has done much to free Catholic thought of the creeping moralism that has long threatened it, and it has already gone a long way in elaborating an authentic Christian anthropology for our time. Among the many qualities that recommend it is its freedom

from the fanaticism that has often doomed to failure earlier efforts at reform. The new moral theologians know beforehand that evil will never be eradicated from this world; but they are also convinced that it is only by setting forth the ideal in all its fullness that one elicits from men the maximum of which they are capable. It belonged to the "uncertain glories" of modern thought to have narrowed the gap between the two extremes of goodness and badness by lowering the ceiling of human activity and by simultaneously raising its floor. Frightened by the prospect of the mostly evil deeds of men, it looked for a point at which this activity could level off less spectacularly but more consistently. The extent of its success was also the measure of its failure. The great contribution of the new moral theologians resides in their having dared once again to fix their gaze on the mountaintops. The question is not whether, by looking aloft, they have succeeded in broadening our horizon but whether an even greater broadening of the horizon remains possible and, if so, to what extent it would be contingent upon a more complete return to the great sources of the Christian Faith.

NOTES

1 Editor's Note: "The New Moral Theology" was presented on November 17, 1962, to the New England Regional Meeting of the Society of Catholic College Teachers of Sacred Doctrine, at Regis College, Weston, Massachusetts.

2 *The Law of Christ: Moral Theology for Priests and Laity* (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1961).

3 G. Gilleman, "Moral Theology and Charity," *Theology Digest* 2 (1954), 18.

4 The principle in question concerns the right of subjects to overthrow an unjust ruler.

5 Cf. Pascal, *Provincial Letters,* Letter 4 (25 February 25 1656).

6 Cf. Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958), viii ff. The fact that Père de Lubac should have felt the need to write a whole book to prove the social character of the Christian faith is itself indicative of the extent to which these ideas had fallen into oblivion in recent times.

7 Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning,* chap. 31.

8 Cf. Machiavelli, *The Prince,* chap. 15; *Discourses,* Book I, Introduction.

9 St. Alphonsus de Liguori, founder of the Redemptorist Order and bishop of Santa Agata dei Gotti (1696-1787).

10 *The Catholic University Bulletin* 5 (1899), 244-68.

11 *A Short History of Moral Theology* (New York: Benziger Bros., 1909), 50.

12 Among the many useful books and articles that have been published on this subject in recent years, besides the ones already alluded to, one should mention I. A. Zeiger, "De Conditione Theologiae Moralis Hodiernae," *Periodica de Re Morali, Canonica, Liturgica* 28 (1939), 177-89; Gustave Thils, *Tendances actuelles en theologie morale* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1940); Jacques Leclercq, *L'enseignement de la morale chrétienne* (Paris: Editions du Vitrail, 1949); F. Petit, "La decadence de la morale: jalons d'histoire," *Suppl. Vie Spirit.* 17 (1951), 144-52; G. Ermecke, "Die katholische Moral heute," *Theol. und Glaube* (1951), 127-42 (summarized in *Theol. Dig.* 2, 1954, 19-23); B. Olivier, "La morale des manuels," *Vie Spirit.* 27 (1953), 381-400; Ph. Delhaye, "La théologie morale d'hier et d'aujourdhui," *Revue des sc. relig.* 27 (1953), 112-30; idem., *Morale chrétienne requêtes contemporaines* (Toumai: Casterman, 1954); S. Pinckaers, "The Revival of Moral Theology," *Cross Currents* 7 (1957), 56-67; Theodor Steinbüchel, Der *Zerfall des christlichen Ethos im 19. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt A.M.: Knecht, 1951); Gérard Gilleman, *The Primacy of Charity in Moral Theology* (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1959); B. Häring, "Renouveler la théologie morale? Pourquoi?" *Suppl. Vie Spirit.* 53 (1960), 115-31; F. Tillmann, *The Master Calls: A Handbook of Morals for the Layman* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961).

13 Gilleman, xxxvii.

14 *Tractatus in Epistulam Ioannis* VII.8.

15 *Enarrat. in Psalmos* 1.2.

16 Cf. Philippe Delhaye, “La théologie morale d‘hier et d’aujourd’hui,” *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 27 (1953), 120-21.

17 For an unusually thorough and penetrating analysis of these ideas in patristic thought, cf. G.B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959).

18 Editor’s Note: Three paragraphs on Nietzsche, also found in “The Nature of the Christian Message,” were in the original manuscript but have been omitted here to avoid redundancy. The first of these paragraphs begins with “Nietzsche’s self-proclaimed superiority…” See supra, 42-43.

19 See the condemnation of situation ethics by Pius XII in *Acta Apost. Sedis* 48, 144-45.

20 R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (1938; reissued as a Galaxy Book, New York, 1958), 174.

21 O. Lottin, O.S.B., “Comment organizer la théologie morale fondamentale,” in *Miscellanea moralia in honorem Eximii Domini Arthur Jansen, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum theologicarum Lovaniensium,* I, 2-3, (Leuven: E. Nauwelaerts, 1949), 153-68. For a detailed criticism of Lottin’s views, cf. J. Tonneau’s remarks in *Bulletin Thomiste* 8 (1952), 327-42.

22 On this point cf. Th. Deman, “Eudémonisme et charité en théologie morale,” *Ephem. Theol. Lovan.* (1953), 41ff; B. Häring, “Renouveler la théologie morale, Pourquoi?” *Suppl. Vie Spirit.* 53 (1960), 115-31.

11

CHRISTIANITY AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT: A FOREWORD

If the theological debates of the post-Vatican II era prove anything, it is that the churches have yet to come to grips with the full range of issues generated by the encounter between Christianity and modern thought at the level of its highest principles, particularly as they are embodied in the philosophical movement that we loosely call "the Enlightenment."[1] This is especially true of Roman Catholicism, whose initial reaction to the new ideas had been by and large a negative one. Throughout the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth, Roman Catholic thinkers remained steadfast in their opposition to the Enlightenment, often without any awareness of the extent to which they were themselves influenced by it. The revival of Thomism, the *Syllabus of Errors* (1870), the First Vatican Council, the establishment of the Biblical Commission, the condemnation of Modernism, and Pius XII's *Humani Generis* (1950) are but a few of the measures taken during that period by the Roman Catholic Church to preserve the integrity of the faith against the encroachments of modern philosophic and scientific thought. Significantly, the last of the eighty errors denounced by Pius IX in his famous *Syllabus* is the proposition that "the Roman Pontiff can and ought to reconcile himself with progress, liberalism, and modern civilization." To be sure, some Catholic scholars were more favorably disposed toward modern thought and eager to find ways of accommodating it within the framework of traditional Christian doctrine, but they were few in number and rarely succeeded in recruiting more than a handful of disciples. The winds of orthodoxy were clearly blowing in the opposite direction. With the wisdom of hindsight, one regrets that the polemical atmosphere in which the discussion was carried out among Catholics on the one hand, and between Catholics and non-Catholics on the other, made it virtually impossible to achieve the kind of understanding that would have laid some legitimate fears to rest and provided the conditions for a fruitful dialogue.

As a result, the tensions persisted, only occasionally breaking out into the open, as they did after World War II in the wake of Jean Daniélou's celebrated article, "Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse,"[2] which brought the problem to the attention of a wider public and sparked a controversy the like of which had not been seen since the beginning of the century. The tone of Daniélou's piece undoubtedly had as much to do with the outrage that it provoked in more conservative quarters as did its actual content, although in the context of the times it raised a number of substantive issues that were bound to touch a sensitive nerve. It was not enough to be told that the modern Church had erected two barriers or "guard-rails" (the French *garde-fous* sounds more contemptuous), namely, Neo-Thomism and the Biblical Commission, against the inroads of secularism; one also had to digest the claim that Catholic theology had erred in refusing to make room within itself for the key categories of "subjectivity" and "historicity," the two great contributions of the Enlightenment to the development of human thought. These were the notions that Catholic scholars were urged to explore and that had somehow to be grafted onto the old Thomistic trunk. Other well known and highly respected theologians were more cautious and wondered whether such a graft was desirable or even possible.

A belated and somewhat hasty attempt to deal with this unresolved problem was made by Vatican II, most notably in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* and in the *Declaration on Religious Freedom (Dignitatis Humanae),* the two most controversial of the sixteen documents promulgated by the Council and the ones that signal its most striking departure from previous Church teaching. This is not the place to enter into a discussion of these remarkable texts, the full implications of which have not yet been brought home to us; but it is nonetheless clear that they were originally meant to reopen rather than close the debate on some of the points that they raise and thus leave us with many unanswered questions. It is no less clear that the outlook which they reflect has led to a new openness to Enlightenment thought on the part of an increasingly large segment of the Catholic community. The hope was that the more liberal stances adopted by the Council would contribute to the renewal of Christian life and thought, as indeed they did in many ways. Yet the record to date is not wholly unambiguous. How one

reads it depends on whether one regards the dissensions that have since racked the Church as a sign of growing maturity or as the harbinger of a deepening crisis in the precise dimensions which have only begun to reveal themselves. I note simply that the bulk of the Catholic population appears to have responded more enthusiastically to the Council's statements that "human beings are bound to obey their own consciences" and that they are to be "guided by their own judgment"[3] than to the ones that limit the exercise of that judgment by reminding us, for example, that "the disciple is bound by a grave obligation toward Christ his master ever more adequately to understand the truth received from Him, faithfully to proclaim it, and vigorously to defend it."[4]

The consequences have been felt far beyond the narrow circles in which theologians tend to move. They have become visible to everyone with eyes to see and are perhaps most perceptible in the assumptions that today's students carry with them as part of their meager intellectual baggage. In *Reflections of* a *Neoconservative,*[5] Irving Kristol observes that it was once his practice to have all of his graduate students read Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors,* "a wonderful statement of the credo of modernity." The list, he discovered, includes just about everything that these students, Catholic or otherwise, believe, even though "they believe it all implicitly, as if it were natural and unarguable." The irony is that all of this has occurred at a time when the premises of the Enlightenment were being challenged, revised, and to some extent jettisoned by leading secular thinkers.

It has rightly been pointed out that neither an uncritical rejection nor an uncritical acceptance of the Enlightenment will serve our purposes and that what is urgently required is a thorough analysis of modern "enlightened" thought, similar to the one to which Aristotle was subjected by the great theologians of the Middle Ages: for only then will we be able to assess it properly and, on the basis of that assessment, arrive at a reformulation of Christian doctrine that is both true to its native inspiration and appropriate to the needs of our age. In the words of John Paul II, it would be futile to seek to live in a "pre-Constantinian," or "pre-Kantian," or "pre-Einsteinian" world. Ours is a living tradition that must not only be maintained in its purity but constantly revitalized through its interaction with the best insights of modern science and scholarship. The task is a formidable one, however, and it presupposes a competence that is not easy to come by in an intellectual world that is divided between specialists who know the part but not the whole, and generalists, who know or claim to know the whole but ignore the parts.

The first step in the direction of a more adequate grasp of this whole matter would obviously be to determine what exactly is meant by "enlightenment." Everyone knows that the term refers to a philosophical movement that is said to have arisen in the seventeenth century (with, say, Descartes) and that culminated slightly less than two centuries later in the vast syntheses of Kant and Hegel, the two philosophers who, possibly more than anyone else, stand for the subjectivity and the historicity to which Daniélou pointed as the crucial advances that the Catholic theology had failed to incorporate into its scheme. Kant, who devotes one of his essays to the notion of enlightenment, saw its essence in the ruthless struggle against the "tutelage" or the prejudices under which human beings had thus far been constrained to live. In the course of history, this tutelage had become endemic, almost a second nature, perpetuated as it was by unenlightened rulers who were therefore unable to enlighten others and, in any event, had no interest in doing so since they were themselves the primary beneficiaries of their ignorance. The time had come at last to put an end to this inevitable but unfortunate situation. Whereas in the past only a few rare individuals had succeeded in freeing themselves from the tyranny of imposed dogma, now everyone was or would soon be in the same enviable position. All that was needed is the right kind of education, which alone would do away with the evils of superstition and "fanaticism," a term once applied to the behavior of religious extremists and now used to designate orthodox belief. Henceforth, everything was to be summoned before the bar of reason. Though religion was not ruled out automatically, it was taken for granted that it, too, was subject to the same criterion. Its "reasonableness" was the necessary condition of its admissibility. In a word, human beings would no longer be forced to spend their lives in the penumbra of the Platonic cave. They could all become rational members of a society that was itself based entirely on reason. Nothing prevented science and society, which had previously coexisted only in an uneasy tension with each other, from forging a new and permanent alliance. Freedom of speech, guaranteed by an enlightened monarch with absolute powers, was the best preparation for a true and peaceful republic.[6]

Before the nineteenth century was over, the enticing prospect held out by Kant and further elaborated by Hegel was shattered by what Heidegger, following Nietzsche, describes as the disintegration and cataclysmic crash of all horizons of meaning and value. One may or may not agree with this alarmist diagnosis of our present situation, but only the most incurable optimist would pretend that all is well in the state of our divine and human affairs. No doubt, recent years have witnessed a number of efforts to refurbish and reinstate Enlightenment thought. Kant and Hegel have again become important alternatives,

and their insights are readily discernible in the popular philosophy of the day with its typical emphasis on individual rights and its concern for historical development. The gloomy literary production of the period between the two World Wars is, it seems, safely behind us and largely forgotten. Its appeal to audiences on this side of the Atlantic had always been somewhat limited anyway. Americans are an optimistic breed. They love abstract ideas, more perhaps for the sake of using than of understanding them, but they are not easily swayed by them and find greater satisfaction in going about their daily business than in brooding over the fate of empires and civilizations. Nihilism is not their style, even when they speak its language, and the literature dealing with it never did become their favorite reading. They prefer Tolstoy to Dostoyevsky, do not take well to Céline, and generally make very poor existentialists. But while all this may be true, the human and metaphysical underpinnings of our most cherished ideals remain astonishingly fragile. Whether we like it or not, Heidegger's remarks, although couched in terms that are properly his and aimed more directly at the European scene, are still very much to the point:

> What makes the situation in Europe all the more catastrophic is that this enfeeblement of the spirit originated in Europe itself and—though prepared by earlier factors—was definitively determined by its own spiritual situation in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was then that occurred what is popularly and succinctly called the "collapse of German idealism." This formula is a kind of shield behind which the already dawning spiritlessness, the dissolution of the spiritual energies, the rejection of all original inquiry into grounds and men's bond with the grounds, are hidden and masked. It was not German idealism that collapsed; rather, the age was no longer strong enough to stand up to the greatness, breadth, and originality of that spiritual world, i.e., truly to realize it, for to realize a philosophy means something very different from applying theorems and insights. The lives of men began to slide into a world which lacked that depth from out of which the essential always comes to man and comes back to man, so compelling him to become superior and making him act in conformity to a rank. All things sank to the same level, a surface resembling a blind mirror that no longer reflects, that casts nothing back."[7]

These very general statements take on a specific meaning when applied to the problem with which Christian theologians have been wrestling ever since-that of combining freedom with attachment or individuality with commitment—perhaps without a keen enough sense of what it would take to make such an unlikely combination work; for, despite all the talk about both of these central elements of human life, we have never had so little of either. The lesson to be drawn from the experience of the past two centuries is that the Enlightenment never managed to find its way out of this dilemma. Part of the obstacle is that from the start it was bent on extruding from its purview any reference to what Robert Nisbet calls "transcendental Christianity." The religion of which it spoke was destined to remain, in Kant's phrase, entirely "within the limits of reason." Later thinkers, Nietzsche and Weber among them, saw the difficulty and tried to parry it by grounding all values in religion. No one thinks, however, that their understanding of religion has much to do with what a Christian theologian would normally mean by it.

For all that, the Enlightenment still has a good deal to teach us, but it will take more than a superficial recounting of its popular slogans to reveal its true greatness. To this day, it stands as perhaps the most impressive attempt ever made to restore some meaning to human life on the basis of our modern scientific and materialistic conception of the universe. Whether that attempt is fully reconcilable with the basic presuppositions of the Christian faith is at best an open question. The problem that it thrusts upon us has been well stated by Michael Sandel, who writes in this connection:

> Bound up with the notion of an independent self is a vision of the moral universe this self must inhabit. Unlike classical Greek and medieval Christian conceptions, the universe of the deontological ethic is a place devoid of inherent meaning, a world "disenchanted" in Max Weber's phrase, a world without an objective moral order. Only in a universe empty of *telos,* such as seventeenth-century science and philosophy affirmed, is it possible to conceive a subject apart from and prior to its purposes and ends. Only a world ungoverned by a purposive order leaves the principles and conceptions of the good to individual choice. In this, the depth of opposition between deontological liberalism and teleological world views most fully appears.[8]

NOTES

1 Editor's Note: "Christianity and the Enlightenment: A Foreword" originally appeared in *CCICA Annual* 4 (1985), 1-7. Fortin was chairman of the Catholic Commission on Intellectual and Cultural Affairs in 1984.

2 *Études* 79 (April 1946), 5-21.

3 *Dignitatis Humanae* 11.

4 Ibid.., 14.

5 *Reflections of a Neoconservative: Looking Back, Looking Ahead* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 319.

6 On this subject, see esp. Kant, *What Is Enlightenment?* in Immanuel Kant, *On History,* ed. L.W. Beck (Indianapolis, Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 3-10.

7 *An Introduction to Metaphysics,* trans. Ralph Manheim (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1961), 37-38.

8 *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 175. Editor's Note: The original concluding paragraph to Fortin's foreword is: "The contributors to this symposium have undertaken to explore various facets of this problem, each in his own way and from noticeably different perspectives. Their essays have the merit of supplying us with detailed analysis of parts of an immensely large picture that needs to be gradually reconstituted and brought into sharper focus."

12

THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE CHURCH: THE CHANGING CONFIGURATIONS

One of the retrospective themes of our meeting is the Church's encounter with the modern world and, in particular, with the Enlightenment, the name given to the powerful movement into which modern thought gradually crystallized from the seventeenth century onward.[1] The earlier treatment of the issue was a timely one. World War II had done a good job of mixing the different segments of the population, and the Catholic community, shedding its ghetto mentality, was ready to assess its relationship to the ambient world. My presentation limits itself to the properly philosophic and theological dimensions of the problem, leaving it to others to deal with its scientific, artistic, and social dimensions. In accordance with the stated aim of our meeting, I shall take my cue from three documents, two of them papers delivered at earlier meetings of the Commission, and the third a recent book by one of its prominent members.

ELLIS' "AMERICAN CATHOLICS"

The first document is the memorable address on "American Catholics and the Intellectual Life" delivered by the distinguished Catholic historian, Father (later Monsignor) John Tracy Ellis, at the 1955 meeting and published that same year in the October issue of *Thought*.[2] For better or for worse, Ellis' essay represents a defining moment in the history of Catholic higher education in this country and served as a catalyst for many of the changes that it underwent in the years that followed. I say "for better or for worse" because, in retrospect, it is not clear that the changes for which Ellis was calling are the ones Catholic colleges and universities most needed at the time.

For all his brilliance, Ellis, who did not have a philosophic turn of mind, made no effort to penetrate to the intellectual roots of the problem he had undertaken to explore. His thesis was that Catholic universities lagged far behind their secular counterparts and had a lot of catching up to do, if they were to establish themselves as major players on the academic scene. There were good reasons for this. None of our universities was very old; the majority of their students were of immigrant peasant stock among whom higher education was a rarity; and informal quotas had long kept most Catholics out of the best non-Catholic universities. (The rule of thumb, as told to me by reliable sources within those schools, was that the number of Catholic professors or students in them was not to exceed ten percent of the total number in each category.) Formidable obstacles indeed, against which, despite its rapid growth, the Catholic community had yet to make much headway.

To say that Ellis's article touched a nerve would be a gross understatement. For months, it was a prime topic of conversation at faculty gatherings on Catholic campuses everywhere. Yet there was something oddly anachronistic about it. Its statistics were gleaned from studies that often dated back a few years and reflected a situation very different from the one that emerged in the immediate post-war period. By the mid-fifties the picture was still not very rosy, but neither was it as bleak as Ellis's bookish account would have us believe. Even the tiny college at which I had just begun to teach was winning its share of national fellowships and having a surprisingly large number of its graduates admitted to the Yales and Harvards for their advanced degrees.[3]

There was another conspicuous flaw in Ellis's article, this one having to do with the yardstick by which the author had chosen to measure the performance of Catholic universities. These were deemed inferior because they failed to live up not to their own standards but to the standards of the modern research university, to which the Humboldt reform had given birth in Germany a century or so earlier and which the great American universities had been frantically striving to emulate since the beginning of this century. They were less well endowed, lacked adequate research facilities, received less support from external sources, produced fewer Ph.D.'s, and contributed little to the advancement of science. The article said practically nothing about the kind of education that Catholic schools were attempting to provide versus that

of the secular institutions to which they were being compared.

If I mention Ellis's article, it is not because it is solely responsible for the subsequent evolution of Catholic higher education, but because it implicitly drew attention to a problem that had been festering beneath the surface of Catholic academic life for half a century or more, viz., the long-deferred but inevitable confrontation between Catholicism and the modern world. The irony in the story, as has often been noted, is that Ellis's stinging indictment came at a time when the secular universities that so impressed him were about to enter a period of crisis from which they have been trying to recover ever since.

In support of his general thesis, Ellis cited a remark once made to a group of Catholic educators by the legendary Robert Maynard Hutchins to the effect that Catholics had "imitated the worst features of secular education and ignored most of the good ones." Ellis's use of this statement shows only how little he had understood it. Hutchins had no intention of holding up contemporary secular education as a model to be imitated by Catholic schools; he was merely warning his audience that they were in danger of selling their own heritage for a mess of pottage. As president of one of America's premier research universities—the home of Enrico Fermi, James Franek, and a dozen other Nobel laureates—he himself recognized the importance of scientific research and supported it wholeheartedly. His own project was nonetheless quite different. It harked back to an earlier age and evinced a deep concern about the fractionalization of knowledge that the new university endorsed as the condition of scientific progress. Whatever else it might be, Hutchins thought, a university was first and foremost a place where the old Socratic question of the good life could be addressed squarely and subjected to rigorous scrutiny in the light of what the greatest minds had said about it. This explains his interest in the books that deal thematically with it and are best able to illuminate it, the Great Books, as they are now pompously called. It also explains his respect for the twin disciplines of philosophy and theology, once the centerpieces of the university curriculum and, as synoptic disciplines, the only ones capable of showing how the parts of that curriculum are related to one another and to the whole.

Hutchins's vision had a noticeable impact on a number of Catholic colleges in this country, especially the smaller ones. It showed them how they might be able to broaden out in a manner consistent with their own principles. It confirmed them in their attachment to Thomas Aquinas and his philosophic mentor, Aristotle. Above all, it helped them shake off the remnants of an archaism that the Neo-Thomistic movement had inherited from its Romantic origins and of which it had yet to divest itself. Hutchins's influence still persists in a few of those schools. I personally like nothing more than to see their students show up in my graduate classes once in a while. They are generally well ahead of the pack and have a lot less "unlearning" to do before they can settle into their new programs.

KOMONCHAK'S "CONSTRUCTION OF ROMAN CATHOLICISM"

This brings us to the heart of our problem namely, the head-on collision between Catholic Christianity and the Enlightenment. My remarks here take part of their inspiration from an address presented by Father Joseph Komonchak at the 1985 meeting of the Commission and published in the *CCIA Annual* for that year under the title, "The Enlightenment and the Construction of Roman Catholicism."[4] As understood by Kant, who knew whereof he spoke in regard to these matters, "Enlightenment" was synonymous with the ruthless struggle waged from the seventeenth century onward against the "tutelage" to which human beings had been subjected or the prejudices under which they had hither to been constrained to live. More precisely, it referred to the attempted reconciliation between science and society, two crucial enterprises whose relationship had traditionally been regarded as problematic, inasmuch as what is good for science is not necessarily good for society and vice versa. Science has as its sole objective the pursuit of the truth. Society, on the other hand, relies for its well-being and stability on commonly accepted opinions or "myths" whose power over people's minds is undermined by the spread of scientific knowledge. To effect a *rapprochement* between them, two things were required: (a) a new science, geared, not to the goal of disinterested contemplation, as was classical science, but to the relief of man's estate via the production of material goods in ever greater abundance, thereby eliminating one of the great causes of war; and (b) a society expressly ordered to the attainment of the goal of self-preservation and eventually comfortable self-preservation, as distinguished from the loftier goals of knowledge, moral goodness, or piety. The controlling image was that of the Promethean torchbearer rushing into a cave to rescue the prisoners chained to its wall and dispel the shadows by which, unbeknownst to them, their vision was impeded. Science or rational knowledge would replace ancestral prejudice as the guide to life and the instrument of unlimited progress. The Age of Aquarius, the encyclopedic image of hope, was about to dawn. Such is the view reflected, for example, in Thomas Jefferson's last letter, written two weeks before his death to Roger Weightman, who had invited him to participate in the ceremonies commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration

of Independence:

> May it be to the world what I believe it will be (to some parts sooner, to others later, but finally to all), the signal of arousing men to burst the chains under which monkish ignorance and superstition had persuaded them to bind themselves, and to assume the blessings and security of self-government. That form which we have substituted restores the free right to the unbounded exercise of reason and freedom of opinion. All eyes are opened, or opening, to the rights of man. The general spread of the light of science has already laid open to every view the palpable truth that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God. These are grounds of hope for others. For ourselves, let the annual return of this day forever refresh our recollections of these rights, and an undiminished devotion to them.[5]

Given such general hostility of the Enlightenment to revealed religion, particularly in Europe but also to some extent in this country, it is not surprising that the Catholic Church should have been adamant in its opposition to it. What we find throughout the nineteenth century and more than half of the twentieth—roughly, from the Congress of Vienna (1815) to the eve of Vatican II—is a series of forceful denunciations of modernity and the "evils' to which it had given rise, foremost among them "indifferentism" (i.e., freedom of religion) and the separation of Church and state, along with their allegedly inevitable consequence, atheism. Typical of the mood of the time is Pope Gregory XVI's encyclical *Mirari vos* (1832), which inveighs against the "poisoned source [from which] has come the false and absurd opinion, or rather delirium, according to which the liberty of conscience of each human being ought to be affirmed and defended." In the same vein, the last of the eighty "errors" condemned by Pius IX in his famous *Syllabus of Errors* (1870) is the proposition that "the Roman Pontiff can and ought to reconcile himself with progress, liberalism, and modern civilization."

The striking thing in all of this is that modern thought was portrayed, not as a simple aberration, but as something diabolical in root and branch—a universal conspiracy aimed at nothing less than the destruction of Christianity and, therewith, the whole of civilization, of which, according to a new argument developed for this purpose, the Christian religion was the true source. An apocalyptic battle between God and Satan was shaping up for which one had to be armed. As Pope Pius X wrote in his inaugural encyclical,

> ... there is good reason to fear lest this great perversity may be as it were a foretaste and perhaps the beginning of those evils which are reserved for the last days; and that there may already be in the world the "Son of Perdition" of whom the Apostle speaks (II Thess. 2:3). Such, in truth, is the audacity and the wrath employed everywhere in persecuting religion, in combating the dogmas of the faith, in brazen efforts to uproot and destroy all relations between man and the Divinity! While, on the other hand, and this according to the same Apostle is the distinguishing mark of Antichrist, man has with infinite temerity put himself in the place of God, raising himself above all that is called God; in such wise that, although he cannot utterly extinguish in himself all knowledge of God, he has contemned God's majesty and, as it were, made of the universe a temple wherein he himself is to be adored. "He sitteth in the temple of God showing himself as if he were God" (2 Thess 2:2).[6]

In this battle the Church was by no means alone. Animosity toward modernity became one of the staples of the Romantic Movement and shows up everywhere in the masterpieces of nineteenth-century literature, among them the works of Flaubert and Stendhal, both of them acerbic critics of the new bourgeois world. Flaubert's Emma Bovary, who longs by temperament for the higher things that fill her imagination, confronts in despair the only two alternatives left open to her, one represented by the inept Abbé Bournisien, a carry-over from the *Ancien Regime,* and the vulgar, vain, and fatuous Homais, an apothecary whose only creed is a naive faith in scientific progress. Julien Sorel, the hero of Stendhal's *The Red and the Black,* can no longer find an outlet for his ambitions in either the military life (the "red") or the ecclesiastical life (the "black"). God and politics, the two things to which noble souls are attracted in life, had vanished from the scene. An avowed atheist, Flaubert nevertheless professed a special devotion to an

obscure second-century saint named Panulfus, known only for his prayer: “Lord, what century have you made me live in?”

For the futile longing for a heroic but irretrievable past in which Romanticism culminated, nineteenth-century Catholicism substituted the desire for return to an earlier and more perfect historical situation, identified in this instance, neither with the now-discredited *Ancien Regime* nor the Counter Reformation, but with a newly rediscovered, poorly understood, and vastly idealized medieval Christendom. Thus was formed the dream of a reconstructed Christianity that was to inspire the gigantic efforts of several generations of clerics, lay leaders, and scholars to recapture the ground that the Church had lost to its critics since the end of the Middle Ages. The essence of that dream is well expressed by Giuseppe Martina, who writes, apropos of the loss of the Papal States in 1870:

> The taking of Rome did not only mean the annexation of the city to the Kingdom of Italy and the crowning of Cavour’s vision of the unity of Italy, nor only the end of the Popes’ temporal power, but also the disappearance of a political and social structure anchored in models of the *ancien regime,* with its tight connection between civil and religious life. Without a deeper analysis, we recall some of its typical elements: the official recognition of Catholicism as the State-religion, religious unity as the foundation of political unity, the resulting discrimination and religious intolerance, the relevance of the norms of canon law for civil legislation, the traditional ecclesiastical immunities, the Church’s monopoly in education and assistance, the broad support of the secular arm, psychological pressures more or less energetically exercised upon the faithful for the fulfillment of their religious duties.[7]

Virtually all of the most remarkable doctrinal, pastoral, devotional, and organizational achievements of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Catholic conservatism may be viewed as manifestations of the same spirit, whether it be the centralization of Roman power via the promulgation of a new code of Canon Law, the definition of the dogmas of papal infallibility and of the Immaculate Conception, the establishment of the Biblical Commission, the promotion of Thomas Aquinas as the leading authority in matters pertaining to philosophy and theology, the development of Marian devotion, the proliferation of religious orders, and the formation of countless new Catholic associations.

GLEASON’S CONTENDING WITH MODERNITY

Not everyone was convinced that the restoration of medieval Christendom in some form or other was the best possible answer to the problems of the age. The world of political and economic liberalism was here to stay. As Acton put it, the divine right of kings had now been replaced by the divine right of property owners (“freeholders”). Besides, insofar as it allowed individuals and groups to pursue their own goals and to defend them publicly, the new order had its advantages. Equally significant was the fact that the old polemic against religion had by then lost much of its virulence. Separation of church and state and separation of religion and society, it was concluded, were two different issues. One could be committed to the first without insisting on the other. A judicious accommodation with liberalism was thus possible and even desirable, lest, by maintaining its old adversarial stance, the Church should become totally marginalized and questions should continue to be raised about whether Catholics could be good citizens. With this, I come to my third document, Philip Gleason’s book, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in Twentieth-Century America,*[8] which includes an interesting account of the development of Catholic liberalism in this country from its humble nineteenth-century beginnings to the present.

Central to this story is the notion that the much decried liberalism of the modern period was not as foreign to the Catholic tradition as the Church’s long-standing antagonism toward it might suggest. Far from being an offspring of the devil, it was argued, liberal democratic constitutionalism was an invention of medieval theology. A case was even made for the possible influence of Cardinal Bellarmine, a leading figure of the Catholic Counter Reformation, on Thomas Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence. The claim was never substantiated, but it was not without a certain *prima facie* evidence. Filmer’s *Patriarcha,* which Jefferson may have read—a copy of it was found in his library—contains long quotations from Bellarmine and his contemporary Francisco Suarez, the leading scholastic theologian of his day, that seem to anticipate and in some way confer a stamp of Catholic approval on modern constitutional theory.[9]

In our own century, support for the “medieval-roots-of-modernity thesis,” as Gleason calls it, came from the influential Catholic historian Lord Acton, who, in a still widely read essay on the “History of Freedom in

Christianity" (1907), attributes the doctrine of popular sovereignty, the cornerstone of modern liberalism, to Thomas Aquinas, whose language, he says, "contains the earliest exposition of the Whig theory of the revolution." The trouble is that the long text that Acton imputes to Thomas has yet to be found as such in any of Thomas' works. As a good Aristotelian, Thomas acknowledged the existence of a plurality of just and legitimate regimes, but without mandating the establishment of any one of them over the others. That decision was to be left to the discretion of wise and well-informed rulers or potential rulers, who alone are in a position to determine which one is best for this or that particular group. Nor did Thomas subscribe to the typically modern notion of popular sovereignty as a universal principle. Like Aristotle, he looked upon the consent of the ruled as a condition of good government—without it, no one can rule effectively—but not as its sole source.

None of this prevented numerous other twentieth-century scholars and other writers from adopting the same Acton's continuity thesis or something similar to it. Among them are to be counted such well-known names as Henry Adams (in *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres),* R.W. and A.J. Carlyle, George Sabine, Charles Mcllwain, J.N. Figgis, James H. Walsh (in his popular book, *The Thirteenth, Greatest of all Centuries,* first published in 1907), and Ernest Barker, who declares flatly:

> Saint Thomas—like clerical thinkers of the Middle Ages in general—is a Whig: he believes in popular sovereignty, popular institution of monarchy, a pact between king and people, and the general tenets of Locke. It was not idly that Sir Robert Filmer wrote that "this tenet was first hatched in the Schools and has been fostered by all succeeding papists for good divinity."[10]

Even more emblematic is the statement by the well-known historian Carlton J. Hayes, a convert to Catholicism, who asserted boldly that America was "the daughter of the Catholic Church" and that "[not] only was this continent discovered and opened to the world by Catholics, but [that] our country could not possibly be what it is now had it not been for Catholic Christianity."[11] Commenting on this whole development, Gleason writes: "As 'an idea, a type of culture,' Catholicism had shaped the whole of Western civilization so deeply that every institution and ideal of true Americanism had its 'embryo and type'... in Catholic theory and practice."[12] Catholicism was not only compatible with liberal democracy; for all practical purposes, it was identical with it.[13]

Other factors were involved in this saga that should be mentioned, if only in passing. It is doubtful, for example, whether this optimistic account of the relationship between Christianity and liberal democracy would have enjoyed as much popularity as it did in some intellectual circles had the soil in which it developed not been fertilized by the triumph of Hegelian philosophy and its view of the special role played by Christianity in the dialectical process that culminates in the perfection of knowledge. But a fuller discussion of this complex matter must of necessity await another occasion.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

For a long time, the liberals in the Catholic fold remained only a small minority with only minimal influence on the life of the universal Church. Their visibility increased dramatically between the two World Wars where the awareness of the dechristianization of countries formerly overwhelmingly Catholic struck Europe. The real turning point came with Vatican II, called unexpectedly by Pope John XXIII to deal with the unrest that had been simmering for some time beneath the surface of Church life and that Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950) had vainly tried to allay. Two words were used to describe the Council's twin goal: the French *ressourcement* or "regrounding" of Catholic life amid thought in the Church's earlier tradition as a way of restoring its vitality, and the Italian *aggiornamento* or their "updating" in accordance with the needs of our time. From the outset, the Council thus looked both backward to the past and forward to the future. Although originally meant to complement each other, the two moves were often perceived as pointing in opposite directions.

The tension between them is most apparent in the Council's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* and in its *Declaration of Religious Freedom* (*Dignitatis Humanae),* the two most controversial of the sixteen documents promulgated by the Council and the ones that signal what some thoughtful historians take to be a significant departure from previous Church teaching. The hope at the time was that the more liberal stances toward which the Council was leaning would instill new life into the Church, as indeed they did in many ways. Yet [as we have already observed], after more than thirty years, the record is still unclear.[14] How one reads it depends on whether the dissensions that have since

racked the Church are seen as a sign of growing maturity or as the harbinger of a deepening crisis the full dimensions of which have yet to reveal themselves. I note simply that the bulk of the Catholic population appears to have responded more enthusiastically to the Council's statements that "human beings are bound to obey their own consciences" and are to be "guided by their own judgment"[15] than to the statements that limit the exercise of that judgment by reminding us that "the disciple is bound by a grave obligation toward Christ his master ever more adequately to understand the truth received from Him, faithfully to proclaim it, and vigorously to defend it."[16] On a related point, did the Council affirm the *principle* of freedom of religion, a major tenet of typically modern thought, or was it merely restating in a new context and in more modern terms its traditional position regarding the practice of toleration—"practical pluralism," as Paul VI called it—whenever possible? In other words, does the new doctrine contradict the old one or does it simply make more explicit certain things that were already present in it? Scholarly opinion remains divided on the matter.

In the meantime, one thing is gradually becoming clear: in the controversy between conservatives and liberals both sides have been guilty of the same mistake, that of trying to politicize the Christian faith. The politicizing tendencies of the Church's liberal wing are plain enough and leave little doubt in anybody's mind about their true nature. What recent studies have brought to light are the less obvious but no less important politicizing tendencies of the conservative wing, if I may still use these possibly outdated labels. Komonchak is right when he rejects the idea that Catholic conservatism was guilty of "promoting an apolitical, privatized notion of religion." Its vision of an idealized medieval Christendom was fully as political as the naively utopian vision of its liberal counterpart. If so, what is most needed at the present moment is a new appreciation of the distinctively transpolitical dimension of the Christian faith. Robert Nisbet has spoken in this connection of the "demise of transcendental Christianity," that is to say, of the loss of the one feature that sets the Christian religion most clearly apart from the two other great religions of the Western world: Judaism and Islam.

Perhaps the most original work being done along these lines is that of a small group of scholars often referred to as the New French Thinkers whose works have now begun to be translated into English. Included in the group are such names as Pierre Manent, Alain Besançon, Rémi Brague, and Philippe Bénéton, about whom we are likely to be hearing more in the years ahead.

NOTES

1 Editor's Note: "The Enlightenment and the Church: Changing Configurations" originally appeared in *CCICA Annual* 16 (1997), 73-87.

2 *Thought* 30 (Autumn 1955), 351-88. The next few paragraphs borrow extensively from an article entitled, "Do We Need Catholic Universities?" published in the *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Newsletter* 16:2 (June 1993), 2-6 (cf. *CE* 3: 57-59).

3 Editor's Note: Fortin is referring to Assumption College, where he taught from 1955 to 1971.

4 *CCICA Annual* 4 (1985), 31-59.

5 Letter to Roger C. Weightman, Monticello, 24 June 1826.

6 *E Supremi* (1903), 5. Cf. Komonchak, 35-36.

7 G. Martina, "La fine del potere temporale nella coscienza religiosa e nella cultura de'epoca in Italia," *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae* 9 (1971), 343-44. Cf. Komonchak, 34-35.

8 Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

9 Cf. Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha or the Natural Power of Kings*, chaps. 1.2 and 2.2, 3-5, 9-10.

10 Ernest Barker, "Introductory: Mediaeval Political Thought," in *The Social and Political Ideas of Some Great Medieval Thinkers,* ed. F.J.C. Hearnshaw (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1967), 21-22. Cf. infra, 101f.

11 Carlton J. H. Hayes, "Obligations to America," *Commonweal* 1-8 (31 December 1924), 200.

12 Gleason, 128.

13 Cf. supra, 101.

14 Cf. supra, 131ff.

15 *Dignitatis Humanae* 11.

16 Ibid., 14.

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A TOCQUEVILLIAN PERSPECTIVE ON RELIGION AND THE AMERICAN REGIME

The question with which I begin is as simple as it is broad: How Christian is American liberal democracy?[1] The answer to it, however, is anything but simple, or so one gathers from even a brief survey of the vast literature on the topic. At least part of the difficulty stems from the fact that the question itself is ambiguous and subject to different interpretations only the most important of which need to be mentioned for present purposes. It could mean: Did liberal democracy originate with or borrow its premises from Christianity, as assorted philosophers, theologians, social theorists, and historians have been trying to persuade for nearly two centuries? It could also mean: Did liberal democracy find its religious support in Christianity or some form thereof, so that the latter can be regarded, not indeed as its source, but as the vehicle or the extrinsic agent of its propagation? Or else it could mean: Did liberal democracy require Christianity as the condition or the accidental cause of its emergence? Such would be the case, for instance, if it could be shown that its adoption was principally motivated by the desire to put an end to the bloody conflicts that had been pitting Christians against Christians since the days of the Reformation. Finally, it could mean more generally: Is liberal democracy compatible with Christianity or more fully compatible with it than any other regime? The four questions need not be answered in the same way and none of them, I suspect, can be answered at all without a number of qualifications that we who have never experienced anything else are often tempted to overlook.

Recent endeavors to achieve a measure of clarity regarding this matter have been hindered rather than helped by the currently popular view that the terms “Christianity” and “liberal democracy” have no determinate meaning, that the “realities” to which they refer are part of an ongoing process through which they are continually being transformed, and hence that there are no permanent principles in the light of which the issue of their relationship could be debated. If both the New Testament and the American Constitution are nothing but “moments” in a chain of historical events that give birth to perpetually new but equally ephemeral thought patterns or social configurations, any attempt to relate them one to the other will inevitably be seen as a bootless enterprise. The great political theorists of the past were more cautious. They refused to look upon the major works of our tradition as mere documents of the ages that produced them and took seriously the claim to truth advanced on behalf of the competing ways of life with which these works confront us. Had they done otherwise, they would scarcely have been motivated to undertake the painstaking investigations for which they are justly famous. They would likewise have forfeited any right to be treated with the same degree of seriousness by their readers.

Among these older theorists, de Tocqueville occupies a privileged position as one of the few writers to combine a genuine appreciation for the merits of the American regime with a profound insight into the nature of the Christian faith. Ours is a world that has long been divided between non-theological political theorists on the one hand and nonpolitical theologians on the other. Efforts to narrow the gap between the two camps are not lacking but they tend to follow the path of least resistance. The preferred tactic has been to democratize Christianity or to baptize democracy, often without much regard for the integrity of either one. Accordingly, theologians and church leaders, whose main concern was once thought to be the good of the soul, now find it more congenial to talk about social structures, public strategies, and economic systems —the trend was already apparent in Tocqueville’s day[2]—and tough-minded statesmen are not averse to claiming a heavenly mandate for even their most down-to-earth policies. *Democracy in America* avoids these pitfalls. It is not only a model of concrete political analysis, unmarred by the abstractions of modern science or the constructs of modern social theory—this alone would be enough to recommend it to our attention—but a work of pre-eminent theological significance, which unfortunately has yet to be acknowledged as such by contemporary ecclesiastical scholarship. Conservative theologians continue to ignore it because they find it too liberal and liberal theologians because they find it too conservative. It is a reflection on the state of

religion in our time that neither side has been able to appreciate the independence and largeness of mind, inherited above all from Montesquieu, that characterizes its outlook. Yet from it, more than from any other book to which it might be compared, and there are very few of them, one learns what it really means to live as a Christian in a liberal society. It can thus be said to rank among a small handful of classics, along with Augustine's *City of God,* Dante's *Comedy,* and perhaps Shakespeare's theatre, in which the drama of the Christian's involvement in the political life is scrutinized and brought home to us with an exceptional blend of tact, subtlety, and uncompromising lucidity.

The task at hand was admittedly fraught with more than the usual share of difficulties; for, unlike Augustine's Rome, Dante's feudal Europe, and Shakespeare's England, Tocqueville's America made no pretense of being informed by lofty moral or religious principles. If anything, its obsession with material goods encouraged people to think of themselves rather than of others and the blessedly tolerant attitude that it adopted toward religion went hand in hand with a subtle effort to undermine its authority by relegating it to the domain of private choice. Augustine, who was no great lover of Roman virtue, could still admire it to the extent that it elevated the individual above himself and bred a type of human being dedicated to something higher than the pursuit of one's self-interest. The American regime was different and less inspiring in that it regarded enlightened selfishness as politically if not ultimately more important than the cultivation of a well-ordered soul. A cursory glance at its philosophical underpinnings, which are sometimes hinted at but never fully explicated by Tocqueville, will bring the problem into sharper focus and reveal its true dimensions.

THE SECULAR ROOTS OF MODERN LIBERALISM

There are many reasons for preferring our brand of democracy to other decent or legitimate regimes, and it is doubtful whether in our western countries a convincing case could be made for any rival form of governance. This is a far cry from saying, however, that liberal democracy is self-evidently Christian or more Christian than its now discarded alternatives. The widespread notion that it was either summoned into existence by Christianity, or derived from it by a process of logical inference, or otherwise decisively shaped by it, has its origin in outer-Christian circles and is based on a superficial account of the documents that purport to justify it. If these documents reveal anything, it is that modern liberalism developed by way of a radical break with the whole of premodern theological and philosophic thought and was marked from the first by a muted but unmistakable opposition to it. Its earliest and still its greatest exponents—Hobbes, Locke, and above all Spinoza—did not draw their inspiration from the Bible, for which they had little use (even though they claimed to be following it and constantly quoted from it) and they knew better than to ground their principles in the religious tradition, which does not offer much support for them. One probes their theory of society in vain for any substantive element that cannot be explained without recourse to that tradition. Even the doctrine of the state of nature, for all its vague theological antecedents, is more of a denial than an adaptation of the biblical narrative. The state to which it refers was meant to replace the Garden of Eden and reflects a totally different understanding of the origins of human life. It is not an ideal state for which one longs but a state of utter misery from which one must escape at all costs. Contrary to what the Bible teaches, human beginnings were not perfect but harsh and threatening. The only reasonable option was to leave them as far behind as possible. This could best be accomplished, not by invoking divine grace, but by entering into civil society and, indeed, into such a society as would be founded, not on principles of justice and morality, which people are too often prone to disregard when they conflict with their private interests, but on a selfish passion—specifically, the desire for self-preservation—which no one is likely to forget under any circumstances. As Oscar Wilde put it so nicely, and he was only paraphrasing Hobbes, man is "a rational animal who always loses his temper when he is called upon to act in accordance with the dictates of reason."[3]

The scheme was a clever one, and all the more so as it was no longer necessary to acquire any of the moral virtues in order to reap their benefits. Justice as a disposition of the soul plays no significant role in it and is hardly ever mentioned in the literature that pertains to it. It is interesting to note that the references to Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* under the rubric of "Justice" in Mortimer Adler's *Syntopicon* have nothing to do with that virtue and were inserted along with innumerable others on the gratuitous assumption that a political writer of such prominent stature had to have a theory of justice. The opening chapters of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* do raise the question of the basic "rules" of natural and Christian morality, but only to make the novel point that these rules are not self-evident and, moreover, that their truth had yet to be demonstrated by anyone. Remarkably enough, the Essay never returns to the subject and fails to make good on its promise to supply the missing demonstration. Nor does it ever come close to suggesting that virtue can and ought to be sought for its own sake or for motives that transcend the limits of self-interest. Human beings do not generally shun dishonest courses of action because they

consider them to be “below (their) dignity” and contrary to “the perfection of (their) nature.”[4] Instrumental or bourgeois morality is more to their taste and better suited to their capacity. In practice, the virtues most apt to meet with their approval are the ones that are rooted in the needs of the body or of society as distinct from those of the soul, and they also happen to be the only ones consistent with the scientific “mechanism” to which Locke appears to have been wedded.[5]

The usual objection to this line of reasoning is that, for all their dependence on Locke, the American Founders were more sensitive to the politically dangerous consequences of his latent amoralism and eager to guard against them. Still, discussions of morality do not abound in their writings; and, while they stress the need for civic or republican virtue, they scarcely have anything to say about those rare qualities of mind and heart through which one is fitted for the higher goals of wisdom, piety, or the disinterested service of one’s fellow human beings. Any loss incurred by the depreciation of genuine or noble virtue would be adequately compensated for by the material blessings accruing to us from what the *Federalist Papers* boldly hail as the spirit of unbridled commercial enterprise.[6] Henceforth, the greatest benefactors of humanity would not be the dedicated parish priest or the saintly Christian toiling selflessly for the good of others but the new captains of commerce and industry who, by enriching themselves, would enrich everyone else as well. In Locke’s unforgettable words, day laborers in England could look forward to a standard of living denied to kings elsewhere and a hundred acres of well tilled land in Devonshire would yield more than a thousand acres in the wild and uncultivated wastes of America.[7] There were other advantages as well, not the least of which was that humanity would at long last be rid of the scourges of war and religious persecution. The trick was to divert everyone’s energies into more productive channels. People who were busy making money might take the duties of religion less seriously but were less liable to go off on crusades or revive the Inquisition.

It is hardly necessary to add that these are not the only ingredients to enter into the make-up of the American regime—the public utterances of the Founders are not short on praises of religion or declarations of faith in the existence of a benevolent God—but they have never ceased to be operative within it and they help to explain why, for ever so long, liberal democracy was eyed with suspicion and only grudgingly accepted, if accepted at all, by thoughtful Christians, less in this country perhaps than on the European continent. For all practical purposes, the first systematic attempts on the part of religious thinkers to bring about a definitive reconciliation between modern democracy and Christianity date back to the early years of the nineteenth century and form part of an all-out effort to mediate the Enlightenment conflict between reason and divine revelation. As is often the case, however, the new apologists for the Christian faith ended up by borrowing more from their adversaries than they realized or cared to admit. Reversing the procedure adopted by Pascal some two centuries earlier, they set out to establish, not that Christianity was good because it came from God, but that, because it was good, it had to come from God.[8] The measure of its worth lay precisely in its being the true source of all that had lately come to be admired in every domain, whether it be that of science, politics, or the arts. The “modern world was indebted to it for everything,” democratic freedom included, as Chateaubriand proudly declared in the introduction to the first part of the *Genius of Christianity,* one of the seminal works of nineteenth-century religious thought. The old quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns, which Swift and Lessing had vainly sought to reopen, was finally decided in favor of the Moderns now that the last bastion of resistance to them had crumbled. Instead of opposing Christianity and modernity, it became fashionable to proclaim their fundamental harmony and stress the links that bound them one to the other, for only in this manner was it possible to restore the old while embracing the new. Since modern democracy was nothing more than secularized Christianity, its political face as it were, all that was needed to revalidate and sanctify it was a fresh anointing and a generous sprinkling of holy water. With that, pious Christians could feel entirely at home within it. By acquiescing in it, they were merely claiming a heritage that was theirs to begin with and out of which others had since tried to cheat them.

Quite apart from its dubious historical accuracy, however, the new argument suffered from a fatal flaw. It turned the Enlightenment argument against Christianity upside down but left its premises intact. Having unwisely conceded these premises for the sake of a momentary advantage, its leading advocates merely went on to draw a different set of conclusions from them. They, too, had come to look upon Christianity as a political and cultural phenomenon and sought to defend it on those grounds. The mountainous laboring had finally produced a fairly small mouse. The critics of religion were unimpressed by it and remained firmly entrenched in their opposition to it. Far from being drawn into the same orbit, the two worlds were further apart than ever. Between a piety that was daily growing more sentimental and an ever more incredulous rationalism, a seemingly unbridgeable gulf had been opened. The basic question, which was rarely addressed and which Tocqueville was one of the few to raise in the years that followed, is whether

one does justice to the Christian faith by politicizing it or reducing it to a culturalism that is foreign to its native impulse.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE POLITICAL ORDER

Christianity may have far-reaching political implications but the least that can be said about it is that it was not originally conceived as a political religion. Anyone who reads the New Testament carefully from this point of view cannot help being struck by its profound silence on problems of a properly political nature, its manifest ignorance of or indifference to the distinction between regimes, its all but total disregard for the harsh necessities of the social life, and its countervailing emphasis on a mysterious kingdom of God supposedly taking shape within history but whose promises can only be fulfilled outside of it. Unlike the Hebrew Scriptures or the Koran, it does not call for or encourage the formation of an earthly society or promulgate a code of laws by which such a society might be governed. While it makes perfect sense to talk of a Hebrew or an Islamic polity, there is in the strict sense no such thing as a Christian polity. Christians were not to constitute a *triton genos* or "third race," distinct from but more or less on a par with Jews and Gentiles. The particular way of life enjoined upon them was neither a substitute for that of the city or the nation nor a recipe for its improvement but a necessary complement to it. The belief on which it rested was that one's relationship to the transcendent deity is mediated by the person of Christ, to whom one is united, not as a disciple to a revered but dead master, but as friend to friend or lover to beloved.[9] Faith in Christ rather than membership in a divinely ordained and divinely ruled body politic had become the prescribed means of salvation. As Paul writes, God is one. One also is the mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all (I Tim. 2:5; cf. Hebr. 9:15 and 12:24). In the risen and living Christ, all human beings now found themselves bound to one another as actual or potential members of the same invisible kingdom, regardless of race, national allegiance, or social condition.

This is not to suggest that the New Testament is blind to or unconcerned with matters of justice but only that the rules of just and humane conduct that it lays down do not form part of a well-developed legal system calculated to insure their efficacy by stipulating the modalities of their concrete application. It is significant that the situations envisaged in the Gospel are typically one-on-one encounters from which there are few definite conclusions to be drawn regarding the behavior that is appropriate when the welfare of the larger community is at stake. "Love your neighbor," "Be merciful," "Turn the other cheek," and the like may be valid maxims for the person who prefers forgiveness to punishment, prizes mercy more than justice, and has only himself to think about, but they are less suited to multilateral situations involving third parties for whom one is responsible and whom one also has the duty to love.

The other side of the story, and it is no less important than the first, is that, in marked contrast to the Gnostic sects of late antiquity, the New Testament does not preach withdrawal from the world or demand that its followers turn their backs on it. But, while it assumes that most Christians will continue to structure their temporal existence in accordance with the norms of the society to which they happen to belong, it does not tell them how the compromises necessitated by their participation in the common life of that society can be squared with the stringent demands of the Sermon on the Mount. Its teaching in that respect, if it can be said to have any, is at best ambivalent. Christians are ordered to obey their rulers (Romans 13:1) and are reminded at the same time that they are to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). That the New Testament writers should not have been unduly preoccupied with this dilemma and others like it comes as no surprise since all or most of them were convinced that the end of the world was near. In the interim, Christians, who were still only a handful anyway, had more urgent things to think about than the reform of the Roman Empire. To quote from St. Paul once again, "The appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none... and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the world as we know it is passing away" (I Cor. 7:29-31).

The one New Testament text that seems to offer at least the beginnings of a solution to the problem under consideration is the famous maxim from Matthew, "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (Matt. 22:21; Mk. 12:17; Lk. 20:25). But that maxim has in fact nothing to do with the issue of church-state relations, however frequently it may have been invoked as a possible key to it over the centuries. Quite apart from its emptiness—we are not told what belongs either to Caesar or to God—it was clearly not intended as a theoretical statement and takes its whole meaning from the polemical context in which it is imbedded. The question that prompted it was whether or not Jews, who had never renounced their claim to independence, were required to pay their taxes to the emperor. If Christ answered "yes," he was a collaborator; if "no," he was a subversive whose flaunting of Roman rule could only create new

difficulties for His people. In either case He was guilty. By forcing His opponents to produce a coin and asking in whose image it was struck, Christ turns the tables on them and exposes their hypocrisy. If they were honest with themselves, they would cease to make use of the imperial currency while pretending to reject the authority that backs it up. They would also stop laying traps for Him and be more attentive to the service of God.

If the history of the Christian tradition proves anything, it is the utter futility of all attempts to extract a coherent political agenda from the pages of the New Testament alone. Any such attempt is bound to end in madness for the simple reason that there is no way of harmonizing the conflicting aspirations to which the commandment of love is likely to give rise. One can read the New Testament and decide to go into the wilderness, as Antony did, or set out to conquer the world for Christ, as Don Quixote and the Spaniards whose spirit he embodies tried to do. None of its teachings translates directly into a program of political action that would automatically bear its stamp of approval. Later generations of Christians, who had to face the fact that the world was not about to end and who belonged to a religious community that had since grown to sizable proportions, were therefore compelled to look elsewhere for the practical guidance that the New Testament neglected to provide. They tried the Old Testament for a while and, when that failed, they turned to classical philosophy.

Tocqueville, who saw this better than most of his contemporaries, notes perceptively that the Gospels deal only with such "general relations between man and God and between man and man" as are independent of the regime and grounded in human nature itself. Beyond that, "they teach nothing and do not oblige people to believe anything."[10] Precisely because it looked upon religion and politics as "essentially different,"[11] Christianity had been able to adjust to the less than perfect conditions that prevailed under the Roman Empire and the Old Regime, and there was no reason to think that it could not come to terms with modern society as well. True, the situation that it confronted was without precedent in all of history. No more profound revolution had ever swept the world. No social upheaval had ever produced a greater change in the manner in which human beings live their lives.[12] What is more, the new order was here to stay. The egalitarian tide on which it had been borne was "irresistible." Its triumph was nothing short of "fated"—the inevitable result of some divine dispensation, an expression of the mysterious will of God.[13] The question was not whether Christianity ought to adapt itself to it—it no longer had any choice in the matter—but how it could best do so. Hence the need for a fresh articulation of the relationship between Christianity and civil society that would accommodate the liberal democratic ethos while remaining as close as possible to the spirit of the Gospel.

RELIGION AND THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC ETHOS

There was no denying that liberal democracy had its liabilities, as did all other regimes, but since it contained much that accorded with the moral ideal of the New Testament, nothing prevented Christians from making common cause with it. By abolishing privilege and equalizing social conditions, it gave due credit to the contribution that each citizen makes to the common life and could thus be thought to promote a higher degree of justice among human beings. The manners that it fostered were also more gentle than those of earlier regimes, all of which retained elements of brutality that ran counter to the biblical notion that all human beings are created in the same divine image and the specifically Christian notion that "Jesus Christ had come down to earth to make all members of the human race understand that they were naturally similar and equal." In retrospect, it was amazing to think that the "profoundest and most wide-seeing minds of Greece and Rome never managed to grasp the very general but very simple conception of the likeness of all men and of the equal right at birth to liberty."[14] Even someone like Cicero, who could raise a storm about the crucifixion of a Roman citizen, apparently found nothing wrong with the practice of delivering strangers over to wild beasts for the entertainment of the people, as if they did not belong to the same type of humanity.[15] Furthermore, liberal democracy, based as it was on rational rather than prescriptive principles, had about it an air of universality akin to one that attaches to Christianity, a universal religion which likewise takes the whole world as its stage. The French Revolution, whose repercussions had been felt far and wide and which had aroused sentiments comparable only to those associated with the great religious movements of history, was there to prove it.[16]

Finally, it could plausibly be maintained that, by taking a strong stand on religious freedom, liberal democracy actually favored the cause of religion. Human beings are innately religious. Left to themselves, they lean toward religion and reject it only when external factors intervene to turn them against it. Unbelief or incredulity is an accident, not the norm.[17] If it became widespread in the eighteenth century, it is mainly because the Church had cast its lot with a corrupt regime. Regardless of what the leading propagandists of the French Enlightenment might have said, the infamy to be stamped out was not Christianity itself but the

decaying political order with which it was organically bound up. The sure sign that human beings are not irreligious or antireligious by nature is that, before the century was out, a massive return to religion had already taken place.[18] Religion can dispense with governmental support and, in democratic ages, usually fares better without it. Its deepest human roots are to be sought elsewhere, in the craving for immortality that human beings experience within themselves, a craving that grows in intensity in proportion as society becomes larger, more impersonal, and less tightly knit. The chances of its being permanently dislodged from the minds of people were for all practical purposes nil, for the void that its absence creates in the human heart is such that very few individuals have the strength to live without it for any length of time. [19] For all these reasons, one could only regret that Christians and democrats had come to view one another as natural enemies.[20]

It was nonetheless important to recognize that, even at its best, liberal democracy was not equally strong on all counts. Since, like any regime, it was less favorable to the development of certain parts of the soul than of others, it could not be said to produce a type of human being that was superior in every respect to the one that was being replaced. The discomforting truth of the matter was that from the standpoint of both religion and morality it left much to be desired. America could take pride in its being the first nation to have secularized its political life or to have institutionalized the separation between church and state. From the beginning it had shown itself remarkably accommodating to all religious traditions and had provided a home within its borders for the most diverse religious groups. In many ways, the experiment had proved successful almost beyond imagination. Yet history also demonstrated that the privatization of religion via its subordination to an independent standard of political unity was not an unmixed blessing. Modern democracy had the merit of discouraging fanaticism and religious strife but, by the same token, it was not especially favorable to an intense spiritual life or to outbursts of godly fervor. Its soil offered scant nourishment for those rare passions that rend the souls of mystics and disclose the heights and depths of authentic religious experience. It treated all religions as equal, conveniently disregarding the fact that each one looks upon itself as superior to its competitors and therefore worthy of the enormous sacrifices that it exacts from its followers. America, Tocqueville noted wistfully, had not given us any Pascals. The observation is as pertinent today as it was then. In the century and a half that has elapsed since it was made, not much has transpired that would cause us to doubt its validity. Our forebears did not build costly cathedrals, they built costly hospitals instead. Theirs was an easygoing piety that did not take well to the idea of a possible conflict between physical and spiritual well-being, such as the one that Pascal, who died of old age at thirty-nine, had so painfully experienced. [21]

Nor did the dynamics of the regime conduce to a particularly high level of civic morality. Americans had performed the extraordinary feat of elevating egoism to the status of a social and philosophic theory,[22] and, although no one could accuse them of being heartless, it seldom occurred to them that rising affluence was not the highroad to virtue. Their society was one in which vice was bound to increase even as the number of crimes diminished.[23] Its basic principle was utility, and utility, effective as it may be as a means of rallying the consent of the multitude, is not the natural breeding ground of excellence. The decency and respectability that it fosters are those of the banker, for which one can be grateful but about which it is hard to be enthusiastic. If liberal democracy excelled at anything, it was at teaching individuals to live for themselves in the midst of others. Public-spiritedness is not its strongest suit and expressions of it are rarely divorced from considerations of private interest. The remarks were again prophetic. Americans are apt to raise a hue and cry about law and order when they are mugged or when their daughters are raped, but, as the IRS well knows, they are not all equally eager to pay their taxes. It is hardly surprising that, for all our abundance and incredibly high standard of living, we should hear so many complaints about the quality of our public life. One has only to observe the loneliness, the emptiness, the feeling of alienation or frustration, and the pervasive sense of lostness that mark the lives of so many of our contemporaries to realize that we do not have all that we could and should have as human beings and citizens.

Tocqueville's overriding concern was that unless something was done to counteract these potentially dangerous tendencies, the young democracies would forfeit both their freedom and their prosperity. The former was threatened by license on one side and the tyranny of public opinion on the other. Within broad limits, Americans were allowed to live as they pleased, with little interference from a government that had shed its aura of sacredness and was pledged to the defense of their liberties,[24] but, now that all other alternatives had been suppressed, the range of their choices was drastically limited. Not since the fall of the Roman Empire had any regime been able to gain such control over the minds of its citizens.[25] As a result, the freedom with which they were blessed was in danger of being swamped by the equality that supposedly removed the impediments to its exercise. In the midst of all the talk about diversity, an astonishing degree of sameness was spreading over the land. A similar danger imperiled the unchecked pursuit of material

well-being. Since little or no effort was made to inculcate the internal restraints required for the proper use of earthly goods, people "would gradually lose the art of producing them and would end up by enjoying them without discernment and without improvement, like animals."[26] In its own interest, liberal democracy had to be "educated" before it was too late.[27] Happily, it could be. Americans, after all, were not crass materialists. They may have been "possessed by small worldly goods," but they, too, shared a common human need to harmonize heaven and earth[28] and were more at peace with themselves when the enjoyment of "material wealth" was combined with "moral delights."[29] By appealing to their better instincts, there was a good chance of obtaining from them more than they might otherwise be willing to give.

In this urgent and worthwhile endeavor, religion, which past experience had shown to be one of the chief causes of the maintenance of America's political institutions,[30] had a crucial role to play. Without it, mores were certain to degenerate, and without mores the reign of freedom was in jeopardy. For that reason, if for no other, its importance needed to be reemphasized, but only as long as it was clearly understood that its official spokesmen were to eschew any direct intervention in public affairs. Hence the novelty of Tocqueville's position, which consists in accentuating more than the earlier Christian tradition had done the separation between the spiritual and the temporal realms while leaving as much room as possible for their continued collaboration. That position can perhaps best be described by saying that it stands midway between the "Christian" or "sacred" democracy that others had propounded or would soon propound and the minimally religious society that Locke had advocated. Paradoxically, the surest way to maximize the influence of revealed religion was to urge the churches to stay out of politics. By remaining studiously aloof from party squabbles or the "daily turmoil of worldly business" and "confining themselves to their proper sphere," they could do more for the whole of society than by pressing for a share in its governance.[31] To become a party to the feverish agitation and instability that are "natural elements" of democratic republics would only cause them to lose the respect that they normally commanded. It was not part of their divine calling to become embroiled in the "bitter passions of this world" at the risk both of alienating natural allies and of alluring tepid but opportunistic friends. As bearers of such moral truths as are independent of the regime and, so to speak, "decided in advance,"[32] it was incumbent on them to rise above the "ebb and flow of human opinions," the incessant turmoil of the market place, and the vicissitudes of political innovation. The sphere in which they were called upon to operate was a separate one, and it was a sphere that they could dominate completely and without effort on condition that they restrict themselves to it.[33] Sacrificing the future for the present was not in their best interest and they would have been ill-advised to put their legitimate authority on the line for the sake of a power to which they had no inherent claim.

Viewed in this light, Tocqueville's proposal had much to recommend it since both sides stood to gain something by it. Religion, now rid of its divisive political entanglements, would retain its sway over the hearts of men, and, although it might be weaker, its influence would be more lasting; and, if all went well, society itself would be insulated against any further erosion of its spiritual life. The scheme had its drawbacks, however, not the least obvious of which was that it heightened religion's vulnerability to the single greatest threat to the life of democratic societies, the tyranny of public opinion. It freed religion from government control but subjected it that much more to the "intellectual domination of the majority."[34] Clergymen, who sensed the irresistible power of this domination, were forced to "treat it with respect" and, in all matters not contrary to faith, "defer to it." They could try to "purify, control, and restrain that excessive and exclusive taste for well-being which men acquire in times of equality," but they knew that any attempt to "conquer it entirely" was out of the question. No one, not even the clergy, was at liberty to propose any teaching that ran counter to "the prevailing ideas or the permanent interests of the mass of the people." From now on, religion would owe at least part of its vitality to the "borrowed support of public opinion," outside of which there was no force capable of sustaining a prolonged resistance.[35] The long-range danger, which Tocqueville seems to have underestimated, just as he underestimated the power of the radical Left, was that, instead of elevating the tone of society, the churches would succumb to its subtle pressure and permit their own moral vision to be silently undermined by it. Against such an eventuality there was in his opinion only one safeguard, which was to simplify Christian doctrine and ritual in keeping with the democratic penchant for general ideas,[36] and then resist the temptation to make any unnecessary changes in them.[37] But the remedy may have been too weak for the ill effects it was meant to offset. In the light of more recent events, one wonders whether from the outset the scale was not weighted in favor of democracy; for there is a good deal of evidence to show that what the churches were finally able to offer to society is often little more than what they had received from it.

LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

It is generally fair to say that the concern for moral virtue so prominently displayed by *Democracy in*

America has all but disappeared as a serious theme of contemporary Christian ethics. For the Tocquevillian ideal of a combination of virtue and political rights[38] a new program has been substituted which blends universal human rights with what now goes under the name of "social justice." As the virtue that perfects human beings in their relations with other human beings, justice had long been considered the social virtue par excellence. How, then, did "social justice" differ from justice *tout court?* The question was not an easy one to answer, especially since Taparelli d'Azeglio, the Roman Catholic theologian who is credited with having coined the expression a century and a half ago, did not bother to explain what he meant by it.[39] Even more puzzling is the fact that the notion was introduced in a somewhat casual or matter-of-fact way, as though it needed no further clarification—something that could hardly have happened if the groundwork for it had not been laid by previous thinkers, beginning with Hobbes, who had already attempted to reduce all of the moral virtues to justice and justice itself to the social virtue of peaceableness.

Against this background, one is tempted to understand social justice as that virtue which takes as its object the proper ordering, not of the soul, but of society as a whole. Its chief concern is with the kinds of institutions or social structures that enable people who distrust, fear, or otherwise find themselves in competition with one another to live side by side in relative security. The view to which it points is that there is one and only one just or legitimate regime, which has its foundation in a contractual arrangement freely entered into by individual human beings for the sole purpose of protecting the basic rights with which they claimed to be endowed prior to the emergence of civil society. The advantage of the new approach was that its successful implementation did not depend on the prudence of rulers or the development of virtuous habits on the part of their subjects. It thus greatly reduced the element of chance in the management of political affairs. The perfect social order was possible anywhere and at any time. In order to be just, one had only to comply with its requirements. Henceforward, the study of social justice, with its typical stress on institutions rather than on character, would replace the discussion of the best regime as the guiding theme of political philosophy.

Taparelli's own all too brief treatment of this subject leads one to suspect that he had not given much thought to the theoretical implications of his new theory. His less eclectic nineteenth-century followers, who were left to wrestle with it, appear to have been mainly intent on determining to which of the three hitherto known kinds of justice—legal, distributive, and commutative—social justice bore the closest resemblance. The better minds plumped for legal justice, but with some reservations, since the connotations did not appear to be quite the same in both cases. Legal justice as Aristotle had defined it was manifestly linked to the exercise of the other moral virtues. Whether the same could be said of social justice was unclear. The doubts that they still harbored concerning this matter were removed by later theorists, who began by divorcing ethics from politics altogether, the study of virtue being reserved for the former and that of social structures for the latter, and who went on from there to transform ethics itself into a science dealing, not with moral character, but with such essentially non-moral matters as the techniques of "values clarification," "decision making," and "conflict resolution." It is symptomatic of the uneasiness that most of our contemporaries experience in talking about moral virtue that even the Roman Catholic bishops of this country hardly mention it at all in such documents as their 1983 pastoral on nuclear warfare and, more recently, the first draft of their pastoral on the American economy.[40] The currently most popular view in all circles, ecclesiastical as well as secular, is the one attributed to the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov:* "Feed men, and then ask of them virtue." The Grand Inquisitor was more lucid, however; he knew that "freedom and bread enough for all are inconceivable together" and that, when it comes to a choice between the two, most people prefer bread, which is "more certain."[41]

This brings us back to the Tocquevillian perspective that I have tried to present and to the fundamental question with which it challenges us, namely, whether the best way to achieve the just social order that all decent persons seek is to subordinate education or the formation of character to the reform of our political structures or the rooting out of the so-called "systemic evils" that afflict our society.[42] What Tocqueville would have considered to be the greatest tragedy of our time is not that the question has since been answered in the affirmative but that it is no longer perceived as a valid question by our most eminent theologians and political theorists.

NOTES

1 Editor's Note: "A Tocquevillian Perspective on Religion and the American Regime" was presented on March 28, 1984 at a John M. Olin Foundation "Religion in America" Seminar in Chicago, Illinois.

2 Cf. *Democracy in America,* J.P. Mayer, ed. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1969, hereafter, *Dem.*), II.ii.9, 530: "But preachers in America are continually coming down to earth. Indeed they find it difficult to

take their eyes off it. The better to touch their hearers, they are forever pointing out how religious beliefs favor freedom and public order, and it is often difficult to be sure when listening to them whether the main object of religion is to procure eternal felicity in the next world or prosperity in this."

3 Oscar Wilde, "The Critic as Artist," *Intentions,* 17th ed. (London: Methuen, 1934), 182.

4 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* I.ii.5.

5 Ibid. I.ii.14.

6 Cf. *Federalist Papers* 7 (Hamilton).

7 Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* 5.37.

8 Chateaubriand, *The Genius of Christianity* 1.1, Introduction.

9 See, *inter multa alia,* Acts of the Apostles, 25:13f., where the point of dispute between Paul and the Roman judge Festus is presented as revolving around "one Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive."

10 *Dem.* II.i.5, 445. Cf. *L'ancien regime et la Révolution* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952; hereafter, A.R.), 1.3, 70.

11 *A.R.* 111.2, 245.

12 *A.R.* 1.2, 66; cf. *Dem.* II.iv.8,703.

13 *Dem.* I, Introd., 12: "Therefore the gradual progress of equality is something fated... This whole book has been written under the impulse of a kind of religious dread inspired by the contemplation of this irresistible revolution advancing century by century over every obstacle and even now going forward amid the ruins it has itself created." See also 9 and 18; II, Pref., 417-18.

14 *Dem.* II.i.9,439. Cf. I, Introd., 16; I.ii.9, 289.

15 *Dem.* II.iii.1, 565.

16 Cf. Dem. II.i.5, 445; *A.R.* 1.3 68-69.

17 *Dem.* I.ii.9,296-97: "Religion... is as natural to the human heart as hope itself. It is by a sort of intellectual aberration, and in a way by doing violence to their own nature, that men detach themselves from religious beliefs; an invincible inclination draws them back. Incredulity is an accident; faith is the only permanent state of mankind." Cf. *A.R.* 111.2, 243.

18 *Dem.* I.ii.9, 300-1: "Unbelievers in Europe attack Christians more as political than as religious enemies; they hate the faith as the opinion of a party much more than as a mistaken belief, and they reject the clergy less because they are the representatives of God than because they are the friends of authority. European Christianity has allowed itself to be intimately united with the powers of this world. Now that these powers are falling, it is as if it were buried under their ruins. A living being has been tied to the dead; cut the bonds and it will arise." Cf. *A.R.* 11.2, 245-46, 249.

19 *Dem.* I.ii.9,296; II.ii.15, 544; cf. *A.R.* II.4, 243.

20 *Dem.* I, Introd., 17: "Men of religion fight against freedom and lovers of liberty attack religions; noble and generous spirits praise slavery, while low, servile minds preach independence; honest and enlightened citizens are the enemies of all progress, while men without patriotism or morals make themselves the apostles of civilization and enlightenment!"

21 *Dem.* II.i.10, 461: "If Pascal had had nothing in view beyond some great gain, or even if he had been stimulated by nothing but the love of fame alone, I cannot conceive that he would have been able, as able as he was, to rally all the powers of his mind to discover the most hidden secrets of the Creator. When I see him, if one may put it so, tearing his soul free from the cares of this life so as to stake the whole of it on this quest, and prematurely breaking the ties which bound him to the flesh, so that he died of old age before he

was forty, I stand amazed, and understand that no ordinary cause was at work in such an extraordinary effort. The future will show whether such rare, creative passions come to birth and grow as readily in democracies as in aristocratic communities. For myself, I confess that I can hardly believe it."

22 *Dem.* II.iii.1, 564.

23 *Dem.* I, Introd., 15.

24 Cf ibid., 14: "At that stage one can imagine a society in which all men, regarding the law as their common work, would love it and submit to it without difficulty; the authority of government would be respected as necessary, not as sacred; the love felt toward the head of the state would be not a passion but a calm and rational feeling." Cf. 12-13.

25 Cf. *A.R.* 1.2, 66.

26 *Dem.* 11.ii.16, 547.

27 *Dem.* I, Introd., 12-13.

28 *Dem.,* I.ii.9, 287: "The spirit of man, left to follow its bent, will regulate political society and the City of God in uniform fashion; it will, if I dare put it so, seek to *harmonize* earth with heaven" (Tocqueville's emphasis).

29 *Dem.* 1.i.2,47.

30 *Dem.* II.ii.l5,542.

31 *Dem.* I.ii.9, 296-98; I.ii.5, 448-49. Also ibid., 445: "At such times above all religions should be most careful to confine themselves to their proper sphere, for if they wish to extend their power beyond spiritual matters they run the risk of not being believed at all. They should therefore be at pains to define the sphere in which they claim to control the human spirit, and outside that sphere it should be left completely free to follow its own devices." Cf. ibid.,446-48; also 1.ii.9, 295-96.

32 *Dem.* I.i.2,47.

33 Ibid. I.ii.9,297,299.

34 See esp. *Dem.* 1.ii.7, 246-61.

35 Ibid. II.i.5, 448-49.

36 Ibid. II.i.3, 437-41.

37 Ibid., 447-48: "I anticipate the objection that religions with general and eternal truths for their subject cannot thus trim their sails to the changing urges of each century without losing their reputation for certainty in men's eyes. My answer is that one must make a very careful distinction between the chief opinions which form a belief and are what the theologians call articles of faith, and those secondary notions which are connected with it. Religions are bound to hold firmly to the first, whatever may be the spirit of the time. But they should be very careful not to bind themselves like that to the secondary ones at a time when everything is in flux and the mind, accustomed to the moving pageant of human affairs, is reluctant to be held fixed."

38 See, for example, *Dem.* I.ii.9, 237-40.

39 Luigi Taparelli d'Azeglio, *Saggio teoretico di diritto naturale appogiato sul fatto* (Palermo: A spese degli editori, 1840 and Rome: Civiltà Cattolica, 1855), Vol. 1, Bk. ii, chap. 3: "Nozioni del diritto e della giustizia sociale," Rome edition, 220-32. The French translator of this once popular work, who may have been uncomfortable with Taparelli's neologism, hides it by inverting the word order of the chapter's title; cf. *Essai théorique de droit naturel base sur les faits,* Vol. I (Paris: Casterman, 1875), 142: "De la justice et du droit social."

40 *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response* (1983) *and Economic Justice for* All (1986), resp.

41 *The Brothers Karamazov,* trans. Constance Garnett (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), 300.

42 Cf. *Dem.* II.iii.7, 701: "It would seem that sovereigns now only seek to do great things with men. I wish they would try a little more to make men great, that they should attach less importance to the work and more to the workman, that they should constantly remember that a nation cannot long remain great if each man is individually weak, and that no one has yet devised a form of society or a political combination which can make people energetic when it is composed of citizens who are flabby and feeble."

14

HUMANAE VITAE'S SILVER JUBILEE: TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER

Reading some of the current literature on *Humanae Vitae,* whose silver jubilee we are here to commemorate,[1] reminded me of the prayer attributed to an early and unjustly forgotten Christian saint named Panulfus, who would have said, "Lord, what century have you made me live in?!"

Few encyclicals, if any, have met with such fierce opposition on the part of so many theologians and even bishops, particularly in this country. *Humani Generis* divided large segments of the theological community when it came out in 1950, but the furor that accompanied it soon abated and all but died out when Vatican II was convoked less than ten years later. After twenty-five years, the storm surrounding *Humanae Vitae* rages on, still as intense in some quarters as it was when it first erupted. Nor is there any sign that the deadlock is about to be broken. Both sides are dug in; neither one willing to yield an inch of ground to its opponent. This surely says something about *Humanae Vitae,* but it may say even more about the state of contemporary theology, which by all accounts is in a state of unremitting turmoil, not to say confusion. Never in my experience, and I have been in the business a long time, as you can tell from this old grey head, have dissenting theologians shown so much eagerness to pit their authority against that of Catholic officialdom and so little eagerness to achieve a measure of clarity about fundamental issues.

The situation is the more puzzling as the encyclical merely restates with an eye to the needs of our day the standard Catholic teaching regarding conjugal morality. It views marriage as an institution that is ordered in the first instance to procreation and the education of children and condemns as morally wrong any attempt to sever by artificial means the link between the sexual act and this end.

The teaching of *Humanae Vitae* rests on the classic natural law premise that children constitute the common good of the family and its ultimate *raison d'être.* This is not to deny that marriage serves other important ends as well, foremost among them friendship between the spouses and their mutual solace. It is simply to say that this subsidiary end is fully intelligible only within the context of the primary end. If the Church has always insisted on the monogamous and permanent character of the marital union, it is precisely because such a union is the one that is best suited for the all-important task not only of bringing children into the world but of caring for them in their early years and eventually providing them with a proper moral and intellectual formation. It is also, by reason of the responsibilities that it entails and the sacrifices that it demands, the one most compatible with human dignity and self-respect.

We know of course that, quite independently of the will of the spouses, some marriages are infertile, but this does not alter the fact that in and of itself marriage is for the sake of the transmission of life. Its other ends, companionship and the like, are in some measure possible without marriage, whereas childbearing and its necessary prolongation, namely, the education of one's offspring, cannot be adequately attained outside of it. If *Humanae Vitae* can be reproached for anything, it is for not paying sufficient attention to this.

In retrospect, *Humanae Vitae* can be said to have been truly prophetic. It foresaw that the use of contraceptives and the development of a contraceptive mentality would deal a severe blow to family life and therewith to society as a whole. Its worst fears appear to have materialized, to an extent that even it could not have foreseen. It is no accident that the term "family" is daily becoming more ambiguous. In addition to the familiar distinction between the nuclear and the extended family, we now have blended, dysfunctional, single-parent, fatherless, postmodern, and even post-marital families. Some sociologists see among the "underclass" of American cities a movement from the "single-parent family" to the "no-parent child." Homosexual partnerships are being granted both family status in law and the right to adopt children. Through the combination of *in vitro* fertilization and surrogate motherhood, it is now possible to think of some children as having three biological parents. Thinkers at the cutting edge of the liberal movement have gone so far as to speak of such "brave-new-world" creations as "recombinant family life"

and “divorce-extended families.”

God knows what other nightmarish choices are waiting to be added to the menu. Only the other week they announced the opening of a sperm bank in Cambridge [not far from where I live]. So now we have sex without children and children without sex: Cambridge looks more and more to me like a Fellini film. Once nature has been abandoned as a guide to human action, almost anything becomes conceivable. Things like these, I take it, are what prompted the distinguished Harvard political theorist Carl Friedrich to refer to the situation as “a broad philosophical problem to which only the Catholic tradition has a coherent metaphysical answer.”

But if such is the case, if *Humanae Vitae* merely reformulates for our time the coherent metaphysical account of which Friedrich speaks, why has it provoked so much opposition?[2]

A common reply to this question is that the argument of *Humanae Vitae* is based on an Aristotelian principle that has been disproved by modern science, namely, the principle that there is a direct cause and effect relationship between intercourse and conception, in such a way that every act of insemination would of itself be procreative. Aristotle, needless to say, was not that naive. The surprise in this instance is that so many prominent scholars, who have not bothered to find out what he really thought, are of the opinion that he was.[3]

In the absence of sound theoretical arguments against the encyclical, one is tempted to look for other reasons for which one might feel obliged to reject its teaching. According to some people, the most compelling of these is that the bulk of the contemporary theological establishment is against it. It is hard to imagine, however, that the truth concerning such important and delicate matters could be determined by a majority vote of, say, the left wing of the Catholic Theological Society of America, a notoriously undemocratic group. Yet this is at least part of what is being suggested by, among other people, Father Richard McCormick, S.J., in an article entitled *“Humanae Vitae* 25 Years Later,” which appeared in the July 17, 1993, issue of *America.*[4] It is true that Vatican II did much to democratize the Church, if that is the right word, but it never went so far as to teach that the multitude was henceforth to be regarded as the repository of wisdom.[5]

All of this leads me to think that *Humanae Vitae* is not in fact the fundamental issue dividing Catholic ethicists but only the point at which the fundamental issue becomes visible for most people. That issue has very much to do with the transformation that Catholic theology underwent in the wake of Vatican II and the pseudomorphic collapse of Neo-Thomism, which had been the dominant school of thought within it for a century or so. The old view was judged impractical because it supposedly made impossibly high demands on most people. A new view had to be substituted for it, one that enhanced the effectiveness of the Catholic teaching by softening its demands. Accordingly, the combination of lofty standards and moderate expectations was replaced by a combination of lower standards and absolute expectations. But this is precisely what the leading secular thinkers of the Western tradition had been advocating all along. After fighting modernity tooth and nail for three centuries, the Catholic Church finally decided to join it. Living on the edge of Cambridge, I too am inclined to be pessimistic at times, but I must say that this gathering... gives me new hope.[6]

NOTES

1 Editor’s Note: Fortin gave this talk as part of a panel at Assumption College on September 18, 1993, the title of which was “Celebrating the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of *Humanae Vitae.”* A former student of Fortin who was present at the event noticed that, unlike the other panelists, Fortin used the word “commemorate” instead of “celebrate” in reference to the occasion. “Well,” Fortin replied after a pause, “it was a rushed document.”

2 Editor’s Note: An earlier draft of the speech contained the following sentence: “To this simple question there is a twofold answer. In the first place, its teaching was not understood, and it was not understood because by that time few theologians were able to understand it.”

3 Editor’s Note: Judging from his diction Fortin probably has in mind his erstwhile colleague in the Boston College Theology Department, Bernard Lonergan, S.J. Cf. “[According to the logic of Aristotle’s *De generatione animalium],* it was clear that every act of insemination was of itself procreative and that any positive interference was an act of obstructing the seed in its exercise of its efficient causality.... The Aristotelian position is erroneous. Insemination and conception are known now to be quite distinct” (“Letter of Bernard Lonergan on contraception and the natural law,” Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, eds., in *Lonergan Studies Newsletter* 11:1 [March 1990], 8).

4 *America* 169:2 (17 July 1993), 6-12.

5 Editor's Note: An earlier draft contains the following statement, never completed: "Father McCormick's democratic bias nevertheless suggests another possibility, which is that, in the wake of Vatican II and perhaps not entirely in accord with its intentions, American Catholic theologians have, perhaps unwittingly, acquiesced in the silent revolution against traditional Christianity and accepted the modern tendency to—"

6 Editor's Note: The last line was hand-written and is partially illegible.* It replaces the crossed-out sentence, "The Catholic Church had finally capitulated to its old enemy and decided to join the modern world."

15

MEN OF LETTERS: THE LITTLE-KNOWN CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN LEO STRAUSS AND ERIC VOEGELIN

We owe a profound debt of gratitude to Professors Barry Cooper and Peter Emberley for their efforts in bringing to light the hitherto unknown correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, two of the great philosophic luminaries of our age.[1] (In addition to Strauss and Voegelin's letters, *Faith and Political Philosophy,* scheduled for publication later this year, also includes essays by Hans-Georg Gadamer, Ellis Sandoz, Thomas L. Pangle, and others.[2])

LITTLE MYSTERIES

Reading this exchange can be alternatively an exhilarating and frustrating experience. One of its peculiarities is that the two correspondents hardly ever met and were never together long enough to have a serious conversation. No two scholars living in reasonably close proximity ever managed to miss each other with such astonishing regularity. When Voegelin comes to Chicago to deliver the Walgreen lectures, Strauss is in bed with the flu. When he is invited to teach at Notre Dame and looks forward to seeing Strauss, who will be less than two hours away, the latter is off in California. On another occasion, Voegelin himself is in the hospital undergoing surgery. Meanwhile, Strauss, who has suffered a mild heart attack, needs more time than expected to recover. And the story goes on and on.

Similar difficulties beset the correspondence itself. When Strauss has time to write, he, unbelievably, has no paper, and when he finally gets his hands on some, he has no time. His handwriting, barely decipherable under the best of circumstances, becomes worse because of what he fancies to be his deteriorating physical condition. Unable to make out a key sentence in one of the letters, Voegelin is desperate and appeals to heaven.

Since the two authors do not know each other personally, the tone of the early letters is a bit stiff, or so it seems to me. Both parties maintain what Strauss calls "the customs descended from another world, the old world." It is as if, not quite knowing how to address his correspondent, Strauss had decided to play it safe. First, it is "Dear Dr. Voegelin"; then "Esteemed Dr. Voegelin"; then "My dear Dr. Voegelin": and finally "My dear Mr. Voegelin." Voegelin says simply "Dear Dr. Strauss," and later "Dear Mr. Strauss." That is about as far as the thaw will go. The chances of their ever being on a first-name basis are nil. The old world forms are much too powerful for that.

Neither one knows the ropes very well, but Strauss, who is already in this country when Voegelin arrives, seems to know them a bit better, at least for the time being. He responds graciously to Voegelin's request for help and intercedes with the editor of *Social Research* to have one of Voegelin's articles published in that journal. Getting Voegelin to make the necessary changes in the text proves to be a mammoth undertaking. There are many hurdles to be passed, many concessions to be made, and not enough time for any of them. In a world in which the blind are leading the blind, progress is slow.

For the first few years there is mutual interest, although it is not easy to judge how deep it is. That interest would eventually wane on both sides. The letters that we have, fifty-one in all (twenty-seven by Strauss and twenty-four by Voegelin) were written over a thirty-year period from 1934 to 1964. In fact, the majority of them belong to the years 1942-1953. None of the letters written after 1953 contains anything of substance. What happened? Did the two interlocutors come to the conclusion that they had gone as far as they could and no longer had anything to learn from or about each other?

One looks forward to the editors' introduction to these letters, which will presumably shed some light on the little mysteries that surround them. Why was their existence kept hidden for so long? How many others were there? At one point, Strauss speaks of "our *perennial* difference of opinion concerning *gnosis,"* thereby implying that the matter had often come up for discussion. Yet *gnosis* is mentioned only once or twice in

passing in the collection. Some letters were apparently lost. Or is it simply that the subject had long been on Strauss's mind, even though he hardly talked about it with Voegelin?

SUBSTANTIVE DIFFERENCES

To come now to the substantive issues: perhaps the most important theme to be taken up is that of religion and its place in political philosophy. My own remarks on this subject are bound to be somewhat tentative. Though I have long been intrigued by Voegelin, I have not made a thorough study of him and do not claim to speak with authority about him. What I can bring to that side of the debate is barely more than a certain protective naïveté that professional or more experienced Voegelinians no longer possess to the same high degree. As everyone knows, that is not an unqualified advantage.

My reading of the correspondence was guided—"vaguely influenced" might be a better term—by what I learned from my conversations with the protagonists about their relationship to each other—not very much, I am afraid. Of the two, Strauss was the more generous and forthcoming. He spoke with respect of Voegelin and made it clear that he considered him to be head and shoulders above most contemporary scholars. In his opinion, very few people today raised the kinds of questions that are dealt with in Voegelin's books. This was particularly true of the treatment of Israel in volume I of Voegelin's *Order and History,* of which some mention is made in the correspondence.

The one point that set them most clearly apart, he thought, was the notion of History with a capital "H"—historicism in some form or other, or history as an ontological category—to which Voegelin subscribed but about which he, Strauss, had serious doubts. As he explains in one of the letters, history may have been the "condition of the recognition of truth," but it was not its "source." I shall return to this in a moment.

In conversation, Voegelin was not nearly as gracious and certainly not as gracious as he sounds in his letters, where he is often lavish in his praise of Strauss and once goes so far as to refer to him as a "kindred soul." He spoke as if he barely knew him, insisted on the fact that they had met briefly two or three times at most, and added that they had never had a real conversation. Yes, he was familiar with Strauss's work, that went without saying, but it was not a subject to which he gave much thought. Strauss was by then a distant memory that could be dredged up only with great effort. He said nothing about his correspondence with him and referred neither to what he had written about Strauss in the *Review of Politics* or to what Strauss had written about him in the second edition of *On Tyranny.* The tone of his reply was, to say the least, less cordial than that of the letters. Had he developed second thoughts about Strauss? Did later run-ins with Straussians do anything to sour the once pleasant memories? Or had age taken its toll and dampened the enthusiasm of the earlier years? After all, this was an old man speaking, one whose death would occur only a few months later. Whatever the answer, there is no doubt that the letters give us an inside look at a world populated by intellectual giants the likes of whom we are not apt to meet for quite some time. But for one of these giants it had already lost some of its luster.

VOEGELIN'S VESTIGIAL MODERNITY

As I mentioned a moment ago, Strauss thought that the issue between him and Voegelin turned on the notion of History or historical consciousness. The letters reveal that he found in Voegelin an ally insofar as the latter, unlike most twentieth-century scholars, was deeply critical of modernity and aware of the break that it represented with pre-modem thought. His final judgment, however, is that Voegelin had not gone far enough. He was still too modern and in a sense too religious. The two go together to the extent that late modernity, in both its historicist and Hegelian forms, was at bottom an attempt to mediate the Enlightenment conflict between reason and revelation by synthesizing them on a higher plane.

The vestigial modernity shows itself in Voegelin's contention that Christianity represented a new level of consciousness, that it was grounded in experiences to which Plato and Aristotle did not and could not have had access, and that with its appearance a new and broader horizon had been opened up which made any return to pre-Christian philosophic thought unthinkable. Plato and Aristotle were no longer viable alternatives because their essential Greekness, or "helleno-centrism," had been made plain for everyone to see. To put the matter in terms that Strauss does not use but that may clarify his thought, Voegelin thought he was out of the cave, the Platonic image for the polis and its conventions, but that Plato and Aristotle were still in it and doomed to remain there. According to Strauss, Neo-Thomism was more radical in its intent. It betrayed a fuller appreciation of the fundamental incompatibility of modern and pre-modern modes of thought. Unfortunately, its implementation was beneath criticism and hence "not worth considering." Its chief exponents were involved in a project of their own, which was to reaccredit Catholic Christianity by reconciling Thomas Aquinas with modern thought. As a result, they, too, like Voegelin,

ended up by conceding too much to modernity. The product was a hybrid that had no real chance of survival. In Strauss's view, the greater universality that Voegelin attributed to the Christian revelation was not something to be taken for granted. As a religion that understood itself as divinely revealed, Christianity had to contend with the phenomenon of the multiplicity of *theioi nomoi,* of divine or allegedly divine revelations. Its universality was itself a matter of faith, and hence not obvious to everyone.

Voegelin's compromise with modernity further reveals itself in the ascription of a religious grounding to classical philosophy. This grounding takes a different form in the case of Plato on the one hand and Aristotle on the other. Plato's fundamental insights are conveyed through the medium of myth. Aristotle is the "intellectual mystic," whose thought is cast in a more rational or discursive mode, but who is not any less religious on that account. According to Strauss, one blurs the basic issue when one presents Plato and Aristotle as religious thinkers. A close analysis of their works reveals another orientation altogether, one that sets them apart from the entire tradition of Greek religion, poetry, and mythology. The problem becomes even more acute once revealed religion makes its appearance. Some rapprochement between Athens and Jerusalem may be possible; but not to the point of synthesizing one with the other, for "every synthesis is actually an option either for Jerusalem or for Athens."

Further problems arose for Strauss in connection with Voegelin's attempt to trace the origins of modernity to certain medieval developments such as the one associated with Joachim of Flora. On that telling, the medieval "gnostics" were the ones who set the Western world on the course that it would follow down to our time. They were the first to jettison the classical and Christian notions of transcendence. Voegelin has two key categories: transcendence and immanence. The modern world rejected the former in favor of the latter, but this alone does not give us an adequate insight into modernity's essence. What characterizes modernity in the strictest sense is not just its opposition to pre-modernity but its derivation from it by way of an immanentization of the eschaton or the transcendent. In simple terms, modernity is a secularized version of Christianity. Having no independent rational principle, it is by definition a parasitic phenomenon. Unlike other proponents of the secularization thesis, however, Voegelin sees modernity, not as the perfection of pre-modern thought, but as its corruption.

The only other point to which I would call attention concerns Voegelin's remarks about Husserl and specifically his complaint that Husserl was still caught up in the epistemological problem, the central problem of modern philosophy and a necessary consequence of modernity's promethean effort at immanentization. Strauss has a greater regard for Husserl and a profound admiration for his attempt to rethink the whole of philosophy on the basis of modern science. He denies that Husserl's problem is the epistemological problem and, without pronouncing himself on the validity or the success of Husserl's enterprise, does not conceal his appreciation for what Husserl was trying to do. Against Voegelin, he also denies that there is an element of construction in Husserl's project. Husserl's "constitution" is not the same thing as Kant's "construction." For Husseri—as opposed to Kant—the object of thought has a being independent of the process by which it is apprehended. It is given, rather than produced or constructed by the human consciousness. One arrives at a knowledge of it by means of a phenomenological description of the datum of experience.

The strength of Voegelin's position is that it seeks to preserve or recover an ontological grounding for human thought and action against the denigrations and the phenomenalism of the bulk of modern philosophy. Voegelin took that grounding to be lacking in Husserl and may have thought that it was lacking in Strauss as well. This brings us to what may be the most subtle difference between the two thinkers. Voegelin is clearly of the opinion that the political orders devised by human beings are rooted in antecedent ontological considerations, for it is only once the soul is constituted that it can express itself in these orders. Strauss is not convinced that such a view does justice to the complexity of the situation in which human beings find themselves. It presupposes that the soul can constitute itself independently of civil society and thus fails to appreciate the extent to which the latter influences the soul's constitution. In short, Voegelin does not take politics seriously enough.

I am not at all confident that I have done justice to Voegelin. My only aim was to call attention to some of the problems raised by the correspondence and which I formulated in terms that I can understand. These may not be the best possible terms; but then, non-Voegelinians have always had difficulties with Voegelin's terms.

CONCLUSION

What do we learn from the correspondence that we did not already know or could not know from other sources about Strauss's or Voegelin's thought? Not much, I suspect. Both authors have written extensively

elsewhere on the subjects with which they deal here. There is, nevertheless, in the letters a certain bluntness or candor that would have been out of place in a piece written for publication. This is true, for example, of the disobliging remarks made about Karl Popper by Strauss, who finds him to be someone who cannot "think rationally," and by Voegelin, who dismisses Popper's books as "impudent, dilettantish crap." It is also true of some of Strauss's remarks about Neo-Thomism and about Protestantism, which Strauss would never have published in that form lest they should give offense to colleagues or friends for whom he had a good deal of respect, even if he was not in complete agreement with them.

Not surprisingly, neither one appears to have learned much from the other or to have budged in any way from his position. I say "not surprisingly" because they were both in their forties, and hence well past the age of intellectual conversion, when they first came into contact with each other. We find them at the end pretty much as they were at the beginning. The debate has merely served to confirm them in the convictions at which they had arrived before the exchange began. It may have cast their differences in a sharper light by forcing them to respond directly to each other, but otherwise everything remains as it was. We do discover that the works which they would later publish were already being contemplated, mulled over, or taking shape in their minds, but that is not surprising either.

What the correspondence has made us see, in case we had not seen it already, is the nature of the philosophic dialogue and the theoretical as well as extratheoretical obstacles that stand in the way of its producing the agreement that constitutes its goal. In an age that has mostly given up on truth, the example is an edifying one. That a conversation such as this one was possible in our time, regardless of its result, reminds us of a certain higher calling the existence of which has all but vanished from our impoverished intellectual horizon.

NOTES

1 Editor's Note: "Men of Letters" originally appeared in *Crisis* 9:3 (March 1991), 33-36. For more on the Strauss-Voegelin correspondence, cf. "Straussian Reflections on the Voegelin-Strauss Correspondence" (*CE 2*: 329-36) and "Comment on Hughes," infra, 277-79.

2 *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence Between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin,* eds. P. Emberley and B. Cooper (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

IV

CATHOLIC EDUCATION: ITS PAST AND ITS FUTURE

16

WHY I AM NOT A THOMIST

It came as something of a shock to be asked recently by an editor of Crisis to write an article explaining why I am not a Thomist.[1] I thought I was—a teenage Thomist, to be sure, but as a Jewish friend of mine with an irrepressible sense of humor likes to say, "Vaance a Thomist, alvays a Thomist."

THOMISM IN THE FORTIES AND FIFTIES

I hasten to add that the variety of Thomism with which I was imbued as a college student is quite different from the one that prevailed in Catholic higher education in those years, that is, the forties and fifties. Three figures dominated the intellectual scene: Garrigou-Lagrange, Jacques Maritain, and Étienne Gilson, the great historian of medieval thought. They were not that close but together they formed a holy trinity to whom one could turn for guidance in virtually all matters. Of the twelve hundred-odd members of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, for example, a good 85% would have been disciples of Maritain, who taught for a number of years at Princeton and was more popular in this country than in his own. (In the early fifties, the French magazine *Table Ronde* published an article entitled "Who Is Jacques Maritain?" thereby implying that not too many of his fellow countrymen remembered him.) By the time I got to Rome after the war, he was serving as French ambassador to the Vatican and had his residence not far from where I was living. We often saw him in the street on our way to or from school. An impressive man in every respect: tall, white-maned, and ever so distinguished. I attended some of his lectures but otherwise had no personal contacts with him.

Garrigou-Lagrange was my teacher for three of the four years that I spent in Rome. A feisty [man[2]] who was in his mid-seventies by then, he had lost none of his vigor or belligerency. He had made his reputation in the battle against Modernism during the early part of the century and had been waging the same battle ever since. One had to admire his intellectual courage. His dissertation was a massive eight-hundred-page tome entitled *God: His Essence and His Attributes.* It takes guts to write a book like that. The word about town was that it was the only book he ever wrote, despite the fact that he eventually published twenty-five others (the charge is not wholly unfounded: read one and you have read them all). His courses were fully written out and given more or less word-for-word year after year, marginal jokes included. A former student of his who had come to Rome for a visit in 1949 and attended one of his classes for old times' sake told me afterwards that he had heard the very same lecture in 1929.[3]

Gilson was by far the most brilliant of the three and a great conversationalist to boot. The man knew everything and could make any subject come to life. Having dinner with him, as I did a few times in Toronto, was an exhilarating experience, a feast for the mind as well as for the stomach. He, too, was a man of high moral character, as he demonstrated when he gave up a prestigious chair at the College de France in protest over the policies of the French government. He lived to be very old, as did the other two—Thomism seems to keep its notable adherents alive for a long time—and he was active until the very end. My first two articles were critiques of him, but that is more of a compliment than anything else.[4] He had aroused my curiosity in certain problems that he had the merit of identifying, even if, in my opinion, he was unable to solve them.

Why was I never tempted to become a follower of these three luminaries or any of their innumerable disciples? The main reason, I suspect, is that I had been warned against them by my own teachers in college.[5] These teachers were people who, because of the war, could not go to Europe (usually Rome, Louvain, or less frequently, Paris) to pursue their graduate work and landed instead at Laval University in Quebec which, partly because of this influx of American students, became almost overnight a lively center of philosophic studies. The dominant figure there was a man by the name of Charles de Koninck, a Belgian born in Detroit who had gone back to Belgium and obtained his doctoral degree from Louvain, although he ended up as an outspoken critic of the Louvain school of Thomism. He was a powerful teacher who could

turn students on and usually did. This was by far the best stuff I had ever run across.[6] Like Maritain, he was an unabashed Thomist, but less eclectically so. It later occurred to me that, although he hardly ever mentioned Maritain, much of what he taught and wrote was directed against him. This was true of two areas in particular: philosophy of science (modern science and scientific determinism) and moral philosophy (rights, the common good, etc.).[7] [Unlike de Koninck, Maritain espoused] a nonteleological science of nature and a teleological science of man (man's natural end, the common good, etc.).

Unfortunately, de Koninck died prematurely in 1965 while still in his fifties and never completed the major works that he was planning. He did, however, have a good deal of influence in this country through his teaching, his numerous articles, and the books that he did publish. Thomas Aquinas College, for example, was founded and is still run by students of his. I decided early on that if ever I were to become a card-carrying Thomist, this is the kind of Thomist I wanted to be.

THE ORIGINS AND NATURE OF MODERN THOMISM

Let me now take a step back and ask a more fundamental question: Why Thomism in the first place? How did this come to be seen as a viable alternative in our time? When did this all start and why?

In a nutshell, Thomism is one of the responses, and the typical Roman Catholic response, to the crisis of modernity that developed during the second half of the eighteenth century. That crisis was precipitated by Rousseau, the first modern author to launch an all-out attack on modernity itself. He is the one who blew the whistle on the Enlightenment.

The response took two forms: liberal Protestantism or the attempt, spearheaded by Schleiermacher, to come to terms with or accommodate oneself to modern thought on the one hand, and Roman Catholic medievalism or the return to premodern thought on the other. In the end, neither attempt was completely successful, but for different reasons.

The nineteenth century is unfortunately not the most auspicious period in the history of Catholic theology. University life had been severely disrupted in the wake of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. The leading centers of theological learning were shut down at the end of the eighteenth century and would remain closed for at least three decades. The Roman College was not reopened until 1824; Louvain, until 1830. Their reorganization would take a minimum of two generations, since the core of new teachers needed for this gigantic task would first have to be trained before they could train others. As for the French universities, they were stripped of their theological faculties and never regained them, and this remains true to this day. The slack was eventually taken up by the new "Instituts Catholiques," but not until the last decades of the century. More importantly, an age-old tradition had been broken, and we know from repeated experience that the restoration of a lost tradition is an uncommonly difficult enterprise.[8]

It is true that Thomas Aquinas was beginning to attract attention after close to two centuries of virtual neglect, but relatively little was known about him. Upon his arrival in Rome in 1846, the year that followed his conversion to Roman Catholicism, John Henry Newman, whom Leo XIII would elevate to the rank of cardinal thirty-three years later (in 1879), could complain in a letter to an English friend about the "prevalent depreciation of St. Thomas" in ltaly.[9] Another letter to the same correspondent paints a gloomy picture of Catholic intellectual life in that country. A person with whom he was living at the Propaganda had just informed him that

> we should find very little theology here, and a talk we had yesterday with one of the Jesuit fathers shows we shall find little philosophy. It arose from our talking of the Greek studies of the Propaganda and asking whether the youths learned Aristotle. "0 no," he said, "Aristotle is in no favor here—no, not in Rome—not St. Thomas. I have read Aristotle and St. Thomas and owe a great deal to them, but they are out of favor here and throughout Italy. St. Thomas is a great saint—people don't dare speak against him—they profess to reverence him and put him aside." I asked what philosophy they *did* adopt. He said *none.* "Odds and ends—whatever seems to them best—like St. Clement's *Stromata.* They have no philosophy. Facts are the great things, and nothing else. Exegesis but not doctrine." He went on to say that many privately were very sorry for this, many Jesuits, he said; but no one dared oppose the fashion.[10]

The picture had brightened somewhat in the forty-five years that separate Newman's stay in Rome from

the pontificate of Leo XIII (1878). There was greater sympathy for Thomas in Italy and Germany, and the opposition to Thomism in influential Traditionalist circles had abated.[11] Yet, even as late as 1879, the year of *Aeterni Patris,* the encyclical that established Thomas as the Church's foremost authority in matters of philosophy and theology, Thomism was far from having won universal approval among Catholics. Reservations about its Aristotelian component persisted among Traditionalists (as well they might, given Traditionalism's historicist premises), and the Thomistic school itself was torn by divisions between Suarezians, whom Leo disliked, and non-Suarezians. The other crucial factor to be taken into account is the pervasive influence of modern liberalism, especially in the form that it took in the philosophy of John Locke, the dominant political theorist of the modern age.

A prime example of the syncretism to which the confluence of these variegated streams of thought could lead is Taparelli d'Azeglio, whose *Saggio teoretico di dritto naturale* became the prototype of the manuals of Catholic moral theology that would follow one upon the other throughout the ensuing century. In a letter to his Jesuit Provincial, Taparelli admits that he knew next to nothing about natural right when he began to write on it at the age of fifty, and, moreover, that whatever thoughts he did have came mainly from Locke and the other modern authors on whom he had been weaned. Although one of the Thomism's most ardent promoters,[12] Taparelli made surprisingly little use of Thomas in his own works. Recent studies have shown that his real authority was Christian Wolff, whose eclectic but on the whole conservative views had gained enormous popularity among Catholics in Germany, Austria, and Italy during the second half of the eighteenth century. Wolff's s appeal to Neo-Thomists was all the greater as he himself claimed to have borrowed more from Thomas than from Leibniz, the other great source on whom he drew copiously.[13] Little wonder that Leo's theologians, some of whom had been disciples and colleagues of Taparelli, should have had so much trouble separating the wheat from the chaff or distinguishing between what was or was not compatible with standard Catholic doctrine.

This set the stage for the second wave of Thomism. Clearly, what was needed was a better knowledge of St. Thomas. This was the task undertaken by the Garrigou-Lagranges, Maritains, Gilsons, and a host of others. What distinguishes this generation from its predecessor is its interest in Thomas himself and in trying to come up with a more adequate understanding of him. Maritain, for example, didn't want to be called a *Neo-Thomist* but a Thomist.

These new Thomists fell into two groups. On the one hand were the archeologists, historians, historical critics, and the like who produced the texts to be studied and who researched the information needed to study them. Their activity was a good illustration of what Nietzsche means by "antiquarian history": it begins as a lively concern (in this case, the resuscitation of Catholic theology); then, people lose sight of this concern; and finally, they end up by [preserving] everything, whether it be relevant or not.[14] On the other were the philosophers and theologians who were trying to deal with the great issues confronting the Catholic Church in our century, whether it be the Modernist crisis (Garrigou-Lagrange), Christian democracy (Maritain), or the contemporary significance of medieval thought (Gilson).

THE DEMISE OF NEO-THOMISM

All of this lasted until the end of Vatican II (1965), at which time a funny thing happened to Neo-Thomism: it disappeared. Suffering a pseudo-mythic collapse, it was unable to defend itself from the assault mounted against it. There is only one explanation for this: something must have been lacking in Neo-Thomism.

I would suggest three things. First, it was still not altogether consistent. Neo-Thomism went under not because it was too Thomistic but because it was not Thomistic enough: it did not overcome modernity. This is especially true of Maritain for the reasons we mentioned earlier, viz., his attempt to combine a nonteleological science of nature with a teleological science of man. Yet as Nietzsche knew, the practical is rooted in the speculative. The Neo-Thomists' intentions were good, but the implementation was beneath criticism.

Second, it was not erotic enough. Neo-Thomism's regimen of dialectic, which presupposed the reign of Christendom, was alien to modern ears. It would have been preferable to do what the Church Fathers had done, to accredit Christianity in a world that did not know it or now no longer knew it. A political mode, [one that could make a case for itself before the bar of public opinion[15]], was needed.

Third, politically it was too conservative. Neo-Thomism was a reaction to liberalism; it was a conservative movement by definition. Wolff's influence [may have had something to do with this, even though] he was an Enlightenment theorist.

As a result, a strong reaction set in on the part of a group of French and German theologians who had

been branded the “New Theologians” by Garrigou-Lagrange.[16] The movement had been gathering momentum for a while; then, it burst into the open. Daniélou’s article “Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse,” for example, amounted to a declaration of war.[17] (The behind-the-scenes political issue was a reaction against Pétain,[18] Maurras,[19] *et al.*: Lyons, where the New Theology was based, was the hub of the French Resistance.[20] Garrigou-Lagrange dipped his pen into the fight immediately with, “The New Theology: Where Is It Going?”[21] Bishops, faculty, etc. hurled back and forth across the Gothic Line.[22] The controversy ended dramatically with Pius XII’s *Humani Generis* in 1950—a bit of a blood bath for the New Theologians. But they had their revenge at Vatican II and were later more spectacularly rehabilitated: de Lubac, Daniélou, and Balthasar were made *cardinals*.

As it turns out, this was only the penultimate chapter in the unfolding drama. The last chapter had to do with the noisy collapse of the New Theology. Balthasar, de Lubac, and the others lapsed into a brooding pessimism that one would never have expected of them. So did Maritain, as we see with his last book, *The Peasant of the Garonne.*[23]

THOMISM TODAY

What are we left with? On the Thomistic side, the only surviving group of any consequence is the group that takes its inspiration from de Koninck, and even it is struggling. Its schools lack financial resources while its faculty are faced with heavy teaching loads, low salaries, and little time for research.

But there may be other reasons because of which the group was not able to fare better than it did. First, the Laval school was noted for its work in the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of science. It had no interest in political philosophy and thus it lacked self-knowledge, i.e., it was unaware of its dependence on the larger political context.[24] And second, it was too provincial. It did not have an adequate knowledge of modern thought, and that meant no adequate knowledge of *ancient* thought. With its exclusive focus on Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, there was no Plato, no Machiavelli, no Bacon, no Spinoza, no Rousseau, and no Nietzsche (though there was a bit of Kant and Hegel). This knowledge of and appreciation for the great authors, incidentally, is what I learned from Leo Strauss. Strauss gave me a new insight into the classics, a clearer understanding of the “Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns” and, underlying that, the issue of Athens and Jerusalem, the highest theme of [all].[25]

NOTES

1 Editor’s Note: For reasons unknown, the article was never finished and never published. Fortin did, however, give this as a presentation to the St. Thomas More Society, a group of Catholic students at Boston College, most likely on October 24, 1985. Though parts of the talk were typed, much was handwritten, some of it in shorthand. Consequently, I have been compelled to supply a missing word or clause when necessary. To avoid constant interruptions to the flow of reading, I have not always marked these additions with square brackets, though I have included brackets for the larger or more conjectural additions.

2 Editor’s Note: the original noun is illegible.

3 Editor’s Note: See Fortin’s answer to the interview question as to whether his years at the Angelicum were worthwhile: “Not really. There were famous teachers there, but not any good ones. I enjoyed my matriculation at the Angelicum immensely, but I cannot in good conscience call it an eye-opening experience. There really isn’t much else to say” (“An Interview with Ernest Fortin,” in *Gladly to Learn and Gladly to Teach: Essays on Religion and Political Philosophy in Honor of Ernest L. Fortin,* eds. Michael P. Foley and Douglas Kries [Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2002], 289).

4 “Saint Augustin et la doctrine néoplatonicienne de l‘âme,” *Augustinus Magister* III (1955), 371-80 (“Saint Augustine and the Neoplatonic Doctrine of the Soul,” supra, 59-69) and “The Paradoxes of Aristotle’s Theory of Education in the Light of Recent Controversies,” *Laval Théologique* et *Philosophique* 13: 248-60 (*CE* 1: 209-22). Cf. “Philosophy and Democratic Education,” infra, 183-88.

5 Editor’s Note: That is, his teachers at Assumption College when he was an undergraduate. Cf. *Gladly to Learn,* 286.

6 Cf. *Gladly to Learn,* 286-87, 288, 295.

7 Editor’s Note: a line in the original manuscript states: “See controversy with Eschmann.”

8 The next few paragraphs borrow extensively from the essay, “Sacred and Inviolable: *Rerum Novarum* and

Natural Rights," CE 3: 210-11.

9 J.H. Newman, *The Letters and Diaries,* vol. 11, ed. Charles Stephen Dessain (London: T. Nelson, 1961), 303.

10 Ibid., 279.

11 Editor's Note: Another reaction to the crisis of modernity (especially in the form that modernity took during the French Revolution), Traditionalism was a nineteenth-century system of thought that considered tradition rather than reason to be the supreme criterion for truth and certitude.

12 See Luigi Taparelli, "Del progresso filosofico possible nel tempo presente," *Civiltà Cattolica,* Serie seconda, vol. 3 (1853), 265-87. Cf. R. Jacquin, "Le P. Taparelli d'Azeglio et le renouveau de la philosophie thomiste," *Aquinas* 5:3 (1962), 427-30.

13 Cf. M. Thomann, "Christian Wolff et droit subjectif," *Archives de Philosophie du Droit* 9 (1964), 163, 174; "lntroduction[s]," in Christian Wolff, *Jus Naturae* and *Jus Gentium, Gesammelte Werke,* Abt. II, vol. 17 (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1972), XII-XXIII; vol. 25 (1969), XLVI-LI; and vol. 26 (1969), V-XLII.

14 *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life,* trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1980), 19-21. Editor's Note: Cf. page 21: "Antiquarian history itself degenerates the moment that the fresh life of the present no longer animates and inspires it. Now piety withers away, scholarly habit endures without it and, egoistically complacent, revolves around its own centre."

15 Editor's Note: The bracketed line is taken from "Gladly to Learn and Gladly to Teach: Why Christians Invented the University," CE 1: 232. For a better understanding of what Fortin means by political, see ibid., 230-33. Fortin also had a handwritten note, which he never developed, that says, "Transcendental Thomism. Use Strauss. No political dimension, mode."

16 Cf. infra, 322-23.

17 *Études* 249 (April 1946), 5-21 (for a description of Daniélou's article, see supra, 132, 133). Multi-volume projects such as *Sources chrétiennes* were also part of the New Theology's strategy against Thomism. Cf. Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances That Occasioned His Writings,* trans. Anne Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 50.

18 Henri-Philippe Pétain was the head of the Vichy regime, the French government that collaborated with Nazi Germany after the surrender of France in 1940.

19 Charles Maurras was a leader of the reactionary *Action Française,* a counterrevolutionary and monarchist political movement.

20 See de Lubac, 46.

21 "La nouvelle théologie où va-t-elle?" *Angelicum* 23 (1946), 126-45.

22 Editor's Note: Nazi Germany's last major line of defense in the final stages of World War II. Fortin, no doubt, is playing off both the martial motif and the association of Gothic architecture to medieval (Thomistic) thought.

23 New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968.

24 Editor's Note: For more on what Fortin means about political philosophy, eros, and self-knowledge, see supra, xviii-xix; infra, 203-4; and CE 1: ix-x.

25 Editor's Note: The manuscript ends with two lines for the conclusion, only the first of which is legible: "I manage to avoid the *most* important question: What is a Thomist?"

17

PHILOSOPHY AND DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION

The title originally announced for this brief communication, “The Twentieth-Century Botch of Philosophy,” was proposed half in jest and reflects two things: (a) the anarchy which plagues the house of philosophy today, and (b) our own confusion at the time this topic of discussion was agreed upon.[1] I, for one, would be unable to speak for fifteen minutes on the twentieth-century botch of philosophy without adding to that botch—it is doubtful whether anyone could speak determinately on a subject as vast as that one in so short a time; and besides, I have no desire to institute a lament on the plight of philosophy in our century, even if there is a tradition of weeping philosophers which goes all the way back to Heraclitus and which Baudelaire stigmatized when he wrote, “This breed complains, therefore it exists.” Instead, I would like to discuss a slightly less ambitious, but perhaps not less problematic topic which, for want of a better name, may be labeled “Philosophy and Democratic Education.”

A few years ago, Professor E. Gilson gave a lecture at Princeton which was later published under the title, “Thomas Aquinas and Our Colleagues,” and which attracted some attention at the time.[2] The burden of Gilson’s paper was to denounce what seems to be a contradiction of some sort in the practice of teaching philosophy to young men and to question the feasibility of that current and time-hallowed practice. In accord with the recommendations of the Holy See and of Canon Law, so the argument ran, Catholic colleges strive to give to their students a rather thorough grounding in the philosophical disciplines based on the teachings and principles of Aristotle and St. Thomas. Gilson’s objection to this procedure is that both Aristotle and Aquinas regard philosophy as the prerogative of older and more mature minds and deny emphatically the possibility of imparting genuine philosophical knowledge to young students. His answer to this dilemma is, in substance, that the Catholic teacher is really drawing upon notions derived from the Faith in order to bolster the mind of the. intellectually immature student and overcome the deficit under which it necessarily labors at that age. The position is brilliantly stated but not wholly convincing, and I have tried to show elsewhere that the problem raised by the author rests on a misreading of the texts adduced either from Aristotle or from St. Thomas’ commentaries.[3]

PHILOSOPHY AND THE FEW

Gilson’s article, however, suggests indirectly another problem which is even more troublesome and which the contemporary scholastic philosophers that I have read have not formulated clearly or faced courageously: the advisability of teaching philosophy to *all* students enrolled in our colleges, regardless of natural aptitude, appetitive disposition or degree of preparation. This problem is not a very recent one, but it has become more acute perhaps in our own day as a result of the rapid growth and expanding facilities of higher education. For the first time in history, thanks to the advances of technology, universal education has become a distinct possibility. Today, one out of every three students of college age in this country is actually in college, and there is every indication that the percentage will continue to increase as time goes on.

The difficulty to which this situation gives rise will become apparent if we stop to consider what philosophy meant to the men of an earlier age. Philosophy is the quest for wisdom or the quest for knowledge of the most important, the highest, or the most comprehensive things. It is thus education in the highest sense. By definition, this education is a rare achievement among human beings. Its actualization presupposes first of all exceptional natural endowments or what the ancients called a “good nature.” And since even the most brilliant assets may be corrupted by a bad education, it presupposes, secondly, that the man who is possessed of these natural gifts will have had the opportunity to develop normally by means of the proper formation throughout the first part of his life. This initial training is not merely training in the strictly philosophical discipline. It comprises the training received through habit or custom from early childhood. It encompasses training in the so-called liberal arts, which first come into view as an

indispensable preparation for philosophy. And it naturally includes, at least in all but the most extraordinary cases, an initiation to the philosophical disciplines themselves under a good teacher. Nature produced the first philosopher, but since that time philosophers have been producing other philosophers; and good philosophers or good teachers are not easy to come by. The great teachers, the great minds, or in order to avoid ambiguity in a matter of such importance, the greatest minds, as someone reminded us recently, are extremely rare. We are not likely to meet any of them in a classroom. We are not likely to meet any of them anywhere. It is a piece of good luck if there is a single one alive in one's time. For all practical purposes, pupils of whatever degree of proficiency have access to the greatest teachers only through the great books. The fact remains, however, that in this study, the less experienced pupils, including the beginners, must be assisted by the more experienced pupils. The measure of success obtained will depend in an appreciable degree on the quality of this assistance.

If we ponder these requisites, we shall begin to understand perhaps why the philosophers of the past regarded philosophy as an uncommon achievement and one which, even in ideal conditions, was never likely to occur on a large scale. Philosophy is the result of the "coincidence" or coming together of a whole series of endowments and acquirements all conspiring in one individual to bring about the perfection of man's natural understanding of the universe. This is not to suggest that the fullness of wisdom is accessible to man or that man's quest for this wisdom can ever come to a stop. Human wisdom is always imperfect wisdom. But for all its inherent imperfection, it is still man's noblest accomplishment. The philosopher in this sense is understood to be the man who is best by nature and by education. He is the one who possesses all the excellence of which man's mind is capable in the highest degree.

Between philosophy as we have defined it or reason on the one hand and faith or authority on the other —or, to state the matter more clearly, between the life of autonomous reason and the life of obedient love— there exists, according to the older view, an irreducible opposition. Both philosophy and religion claim to be the supreme norm of the good life, and stand or fall by this claim. It is obvious that, in practice, one of these norms must take precedence over the other. Philosophy and religion are thus, if not in a state of war, at least in a state of permanent (and fruitful) tension. That such a tension should exist does not mean that the philosopher is bent on eliminating religion. Until a comparatively recent date in the history of thought, none of the great philosophers, with the exception of the Cynics and the Epicureans, i.e., the apolitical philosophers, preached atheism or advocated the suppression of all religion. They were merely opposed to those elements in the official religion which they considered inimical to human dignity.

DEMOCRATIZING PHILOSOPHY

From what has been said thus far the philosophers of the past inferred that it would be rash, foolhardy, or utopian to try to teach philosophy to everyone indiscriminately. Philosophizing means to ascend from public dogma to essentially private knowledge. Such an endeavor, if generalized, would represent the greatest danger to the individual, to society, and to philosophy itself. Since the multitude cannot discover the truth for itself or apprehend it with any degree of refinement, it must at least be able to follow another's guidance. The order and security of society require that the majority of the citizens take their bearings from the tradition of the city, from that tradition which embodies for them the ultimate norm of the good life and supplies them with the notions of good and evil, right and wrong, just and noble. This tradition was thought to be efficacious only if its origin could be ascribed to some transcendent and unimpeachable source, that is to say, to the god or gods themselves. The good citizen does not question the dogmas of the city. Any attempt to do so could lead to the "destruction of piety," to borrow a typical expression from the Book of Job (15:4). These dogmas are not the object of investigation or discussion but of acceptance. To give to the bulk of the citizenry a taste of philosophy, to kindle in them the spirit of free inquiry, would be to dissolve the fabric of society. The modern champions of democracy in the original sense, to say nothing of the classical philosophers, were of the opinion that there is a fundamental incompatibility between democracy and enlightenment. They were thus led to view the unrestricted diffusion of knowledge with the greatest misgivings. Plato's description of the young man who first tastes the subtleties of philosophy may give us an inkling of what might be expected from the untimely and premature exposure to this science. This person, he says, "is delighted and fancies that he has found a treasure of wisdom; in the first enthusiasm of his joy, he leaves no stone unturned, or rather no thought unturned, now rolling up the many into the one and kneading them together, now unfolding and dividing them; he puzzles himself first, and then he proceeds to puzzle his neighbors, whether they are older or younger or of his own age—that makes no difference; neither father nor mother does he spare; no human being who has ears is safe from him, hardly even his dog, and a barbarian would have no chance of escaping him if an interpreter could only be found."[4]

This type of reaction may seem normal and harmless enough at first glance; but it suggests what is likely to happen when foolish or villainous minds are emancipated through philosophy. Nothing is to prevent them from making capital of the prestige which attaches to science in order to further their own private, unphilosophic, or even subversive aims. In antiquity, the person who did this paraded as a wise man and called himself a sophist. Although he no longer usurps that name today, he has by no means ceased to exist. Only to a society which has ceased to believe that barbarism is always possible and freedom always threatened could the uncontrolled and promiscuous dissemination of knowledge appear as an unqualified asset.

PHILOSOPHY IN CATHOLIC EDUCATION

This whole problem of the democratization or vulgarization of philosophy is particularly obvious in Catholic colleges, though it is by no means proper to them. Catholic colleges occupy a rather unique position in our society in that they are practically the only ones in which philosophy has more or less retained its original place as the unifying, ordering, and perfecting element of the entire liberal arts curriculum. If we look for a moment beyond the narrow confines of Catholic higher education, we find that, at one moment in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, philosophy developed into a separate academic subject, partly or entirely detached from all other subjects. Far from enjoying a higher cognitive status, it has rather tended to be looked down upon, judging from the complaints that occasionally reach us from various quarters. Philosophy courses have become optional for the most part; in any event, rarely if ever is a student required to take a sequence of philosophy courses comparable to the one to which our students are subjected. However, this failure on the part of non-Catholic institutions to teach philosophy on a wider scale is in no way due to the conviction that philosophical knowledge is not for the many, but to other factors alluded to a moment ago and which have profoundly altered the shape of the college and university curriculum in recent times. One could say that almost all of modern philosophy is predicated on the denial of the classical principle that philosophy, by nature, is not accessible to the multitude and should be kept at a safe distance from them. The highest form of education, which was once the preserve of a small elite, has become the property of anyone who can pay for it, until the day when it will be possible to educate everyone free of charge. What is paradoxical is that Catholic higher education, which alone remains dedicated to classical philosophy and which is chiefly responsible for its maintenance in our midst, has at the same time, by its readiness to impose philosophy on all and sundry, shown itself to be the least reluctant to depart from one of the most basic assumptions of that classical tradition.

PHILOSOPHY AS HANDMAID

My purpose this afternoon was merely to state what, in my mind, is a real and unresolved problem. In closing, perhaps some attempt can be made to explain how this situation became possible. The radical departure from the earlier philosophic tradition just described is best accounted for, it seems, in terms of the reinterpretation of philosophy necessitated by its ultimate, if only extrinsic, subordination to theology. I alluded, at the beginning of this talk, to the problem raised by Étienne Gilson in connection with the teaching of philosophy to young men. His solution consisted in saying that theology comes to the rescue of the untrained mind, thus enabling it to grasp notions which would otherwise remain beyond its ken. One may question the value of that solution as far as Gilson's problem is concerned. It may, however, find a more legitimate application in the case at hand. By the sole fact that, for a Christian, there exists a form of knowledge which is higher than that provided by philosophy, philosophy itself could never again be the same. The evils that were once thought to follow from the popularization of philosophy were averted or neutralized by the action of theology as the supreme norm or ultimate guiding and integrating principle of human thought and behavior. Philosophy could at last be taught without fear and trembling for the simple reason that students in the main could be counted upon to react in the true spirit of children of the City of God.

On the whole, philosophy has fared well in the Christian world. Despite the strenuous opposition of a few of the early Fathers, it was allowed to develop within the precincts of the Church and ever since it has continued to enjoy the highest ecclesiastical blessings. It is not without significance that, in the heyday of Christian philosophy, the schoolmen were also churchmen. The same cannot be said of other contemporary civilizations. One finds a conspicuous difference, for example, between the status of philosophy in Christendom and in Judaism, a difference which Spinoza summed up when he declared flatly that "the Jews do not like philosophy."[5] But by the very fact that it made room for it within its walls, the Church was able to assert and exercise its custody over it. Such a control is not necessarily detrimental. The experience of recent centuries has shown that the alliance between *studium* and *sacerdotium* is not in all cases an unholy one. There can be no doubt that philosophy has contributed greatly to the rise of scientific theology. It

would be naive to deny the benefits which have accrued to philosophy as a result of this contact with theology. But it would be equally naive, perhaps, to close one's eyes on the deep and far-reaching transformation which philosophy itself underwent in the process.

NOTES

1 Editor's Note: "Philosophy and Democratic Education" originally appeared in *Assumption* (Summer 1961), 28-31. The editor of *Assumption* added the following footnote: "This paper was delivered by Rev. Ernest L. Fortin, A.A., at the New England Regional Meeting of the National Catholic Educational Association on April 15, 1961. The chairman asked Father Fortin for something controversial. Judging from the discussion that ensued, he got what he wanted."

2 Princeton, New Jersey: Printed for the Aquinas Foundation by Princeton University Press, 1953. Cf. A *Gilson Reader: Selected Writings of Étienne Gilson,* ed. Anton Charles Pegis (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1957).

3 Cf. "The Paradoxes of Aristotle's Theory of Education in the Light of Recent Controversies," *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 13: 248-60 (CE 1: 209-22).

4 *Philebus 15* 3-16a.

5 *Theologico-Political Treatise,* pt. 3, chap. 11.

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THE NEW CATHOLIC COLLEGE

Max Lerner once suggested that if all college administrators were to die suddenly and be laid side by side, it might be a good idea.[1] Although uttered in jest, the statement pointed to what was, already then, a mounting crisis in American higher education. That crisis is in part an economic crisis, precipitated by the inability to offset soaring costs with a corresponding increase in total revenue. But it is above all an intellectual and moral crisis, the likes of which had never been seen in the history of modern education. At the turn of the century, Thorstein Veblen wrote a book on *The Higher Education in America,* the first edition of which bore the intriguing subtitle: "A Study in Total Depravity."[2] One gathers, however, that the situation described by Veblen was nowhere near as chaotic as the one we now face. Veblen and his fellow critics knew or thought they knew what colleges and universities should be doing but had presumably failed to do. One is hard pressed today to find an institution with a clear grasp of its goals and of the means by which they might be attained. Colleges not only lack the funds to accomplish what they had originally set out to do, they are often at a loss to say what they would do with the money if they had it. By and large, they have failed to give a convincing account of their own doings to outsiders and especially to potential donors. The deeper tragedy is that they themselves have been incapable of achieving the kind of self-understanding that would lend persuasiveness to their commitment and effectiveness to their methods.

THE COLLEGE IN CRISIS

The true nature of the crisis has become apparent in the wake of the widespread campus disruptions of recent years. What these riots demonstrated beyond the shadow of a doubt is that, in most instances, there existed within the university no identifiable group of any size which stood for anything or could argue its case on the basis of commonly accepted and publicly defensible principles. No single person or single group of persons could speak with authority for the whole or even a significant portion of it. The university had no heart. It was, for all practical purposes, dead. In the absence of any rational discussion of goals, issues were decided on the basis of passion or brute force—in some cases, literally at gunpoint. Not the wisdom of one's commitment but the intensity of that commitment and one's willingness to fight for it carried the day and forced the capitulation of even the most stable elements. The inherent weakness of both conservatism and formless liberalism, whose precarious balance had defined the life of the university, was laid bare. Leadership had, by default, passed into other hands, whose stated aim was not the preservation of the university but its total destruction.

The situation bears a strange resemblance to Konrad Lorenz's description of the shoal of ocean fishes, which, upon examination, can hardly be said to be anything more than an anonymous flock or a huge collection of like elements. Inside the shoal there is no visible structure of any kind. No one leads and no one is led. All the elements simply move together and in doing so find protection against their natural enemies. Any individual which happens to be enticed away from the shoal by the sight of food or for any other reason is immediately and infallibly brought back to it as by a magnet. The school as a whole, on the other hand, presents a woeful picture of indecision. What is interesting from our point of view is that scientists were able to locate and eventually remove from some of the fishes that part of the brain which controls the shoaling mechanism. The pithed fishes continued to behave in every way like normal fishes, except for the fact that they had lost their innate hesitancy to wander away from their shoalmates. They swam resolutely in any direction, and, amazingly, were followed by the other fishes. By virtue of its deficiency, the brainless fish had, against all expectations, become the leader!

For a time at least, it seemed as if Catholic colleges would happily be spared a similar fate. As relative latecomers to the intellectual scene, they had from the beginning played second fiddle to a host of older, better endowed, and more prestigious secular institutions. But what would have been considered a liability a short generation ago had suddenly turned out to be their greatest asset. Their endemic conservatism and

strong attachment to traditional values had preserved them from the adventuresome follies of the liberal university. More out of necessity than out of choice, they had refrained from embarking upon ambitious expansion programs and, as a consequence, were not saddled with the burdens of an enormous debt service in a time of spiraling deficits and tight money. On the whole, they had been less experimental in outlook and less prone to launch out into new ventures for the sole purpose of attracting the funds that were then being provided for such purposes by public and private agencies. Hence, unlike many other colleges and universities, they were not placed in the awkward position of having to maintain expensive busts once the seed money had run out. The trouble with experiments in higher education, as was recently pointed out by a prominent administrator, is that they never fail. Once established and fully staffed, the new program must go on, regardless of its intrinsic worth and whatever the cost to the university. Finally, Catholic colleges had tended to be less reckless in matters of curriculum innovation, most of them clinging to a watered down but still recognizable liberal arts core which gave some definition, if not necessarily a great deal of vitality, to the overall academic program.

VATICAN II AND THE EMERGING COLLEGE

This, as it turned out, was not enough. When accounts were finally taken, when the bottom fell out of the academic world, Catholic colleges proved to be as vulnerable as anyone else. The rapid evolution which they had experienced in the post-war period had taken its toll. The first symptoms of the new malaise began to appear in the late fifties and the early sixties. The example of older, larger, and presumably better institutions, which Catholic colleges vainly sought to emulate, as well as the growing professional diversification of their constituency, had led to a gradual erosion or whittling down of the traditional liberal arts core. The edifice was still standing but was showing signs of wear. The real shaking of the foundations came with Vatican II, with its call for declericalization (however mild), its endorsement of the principle of religious freedom (however timid), and its insistence on the need to heed the signs of the times and adapt to the modern world (however feeble). The latent problem of the Catholic college was not settled but a climate was created in which for the first time that problem could be aired. From that moment forward a new Catholic college was in the making. This emerging Catholic college, I submit, is a product of Vatican II on the one hand and a growing awareness of the limitations of Vatican II on the other.

In retrospect, one can say that Vatican II represents the external triumph of the new theology which had gradually taken shape within Roman Catholicism between the two World Wars and which was distinguished from so-called traditional theology by its greater openness to the modern world in general and to modern modes of thought in particular. The evolution of the Council may be properly understood in terms of the emergence of that theology as the moving force behind its most noteworthy accomplishments. What became clear as work progressed was that the Church could no longer turn its back, as it had done for so long, on the burning issues raised by the new theologians. What has become clear in the six years since the end of the Council is that the manner in which these issues were treated is anything but adequate.

The Council had originally been called to deal with problems pertaining to the inner life of the Church. The key word at the beginning was “aggiornamentation,” or constructive reform in the sense of a general updating of Church life. In the mind of John XXIII, the idea was to renew the Church internally, so that it would present a more attractive image to the outside world. Yet work had no sooner begun in preparation for the first session that a noticeable shift in orientation occurred. The all but universal and overwhelmingly enthusiastic interest taken by Protestant groups in the Council forced the Central Commission to broaden its horizon and modify its agenda. The upshot of this encouraging development was that the entire first phase of the Council was permeated with the spirit of ecumenism in a manner and to an extent that could not have been foreseen when the Council was first announced. It is no accident that among the earliest documents to be promulgated was the *Decree on Ecumenism.* This, in turn, raised the larger question of the relation of Christianity to the non-Christian religions and the parallel issue of religious freedom, to which some of the most turbulent moments of an otherwise relatively peaceful Council are linked. The new concern was concretized by Pope Paul’s triumphal visit to Bombay in 1965.

When the Council reconvened in the fall of that year, however, the mood had again changed. This final session was to be devoted to a number of more specific and supposedly peripheral questions, such as war and peace, marriage and the family, and the problems of modern technological society, which could not be conveniently treated under any of the previously selected headings. The implications of these questions proved once more to be far greater than anyone had anticipated. In the process of dealing with loose ends and unfinished business, the Council had literally stumbled upon what may be regarded as its most original and perhaps, in the long run, its most important item of business. Before it knew it, it had a lion by the tail. The whole issue of modernity, which twentieth-century Catholicism had persistently swept under the rug,

had come dramatically to the fore. Almost overnight the Church saw itself coming to grips with the vast problem of its relevance to the modern world in the totality of its historical and social development. The Council had accomplished a 180 degree turn. From the original and somewhat introversive preoccupation with its own inner life, it had come to a startling awareness of its mission in the world at large. It had at long last accepted to swim in the waters of Schleiermacher and was attempting to accomplish in the space of a few short months what Protestantism had failed to do in a hundred years.

The impact of that discovery was felt in varying degrees throughout the Church. It has become particularly strong in intellectual and academic circles. With the removal of the old barriers, radical changes had become possible; but there were as yet few indications as to the precise direction which these changes should take. A new set of tensions was generated which quickened the pulse of Catholic institutions, but at the same time undermined their cohesion. Conflicts arose, pitting individual faculty members or groups of faculty members against university administrations and ecclesiastical hierarchies. A small number of colleges abandoned their Catholic allegiance and became forthrightly "secular." In most cases, however, administrators simply chose to sit back, waiting for the wisdom that would hopefully reveal itself *after* the event, which is easy, instead of seeking wisdom in the event, which is difficult. The net result has been a kind of floundering, characterized by the lack of vigorous administrative leadership, a chronic reluctance to take a firm stand on basic educational issues, and a pervasive inability to articulate a coherent position which, although it would not necessarily win the assent of everyone, would at least provide a focal point for the endless and for the most part abortive discussions that have since been taking place. The general impression conveyed to outsiders, and often shared by members of the academic community itself, is that Catholic colleges are threatened with their own brand of ecclesiastical nihilism. They too face moral bankruptcy and are being accused of it by perceptive and increasingly vocal critics both within the institution and outside of it. The range of possibilities seems, at least for the time being, to be exhausted by a melancholy blend of confused and inflated rhetoric from the liberal side and a bland, defensive, or jingoistic rehearsal of traditional and traditionally understood views from the conservative side.

TYPES OF CATHOLIC COLLEGES

The present situation is, to say the least, ambiguous; but it need not be entirely negative. Because of a vague institutional commitment to Christian values which still lingers in most Catholic colleges, an enormous capital of good will on the part of a majority of faculty members, and a certain longing for wholeness which apparently persists in spite of the all but total collapse of the tradition of liberal education, some hope of resuscitation survives. But the new Lazarus, if and when he appears, will not be the same as the old. What, then, is the distinctive feature of the Catholic college of the future and how does it differ from its predecessors?

The problem may be approached by describing briefly the three broad types of Catholic colleges with which history has furnished us or is capable of furnishing us. Generally speaking, Christianity may be said to be unique among the great religions of the world in that it is the only one that has succeeded in fully accommodating the human sciences within its own indigenous and comprehensive view of man and the world. Hence we find already in antiquity, and more specifically in Book II of Augustine's treatise *On Christian Doctrine,* a first sketch of what a university organized entirely on the basis of Christian principles might conceivably be. The relevant section of the treatise is both a defense of the mundane disciplines and an endeavor to show how they may contribute to a better understanding of the faith. The program outlined includes the study of such disciplines as languages, natural science, mathematics, music, history, geography, and astronomy; and it represents a concerted attempt to integrate these disciplines into a unitary scheme the whole of which is directly illumined by faith. As such, it goes further than anything that had been said or done by Augustine's Christian predecessors, who never envisaged any situation other than that of Christians attending pagan schools and deriving whatever benefits were to be gained from their study of pagan science and learning under pagan teachers. Augustine's remarks, it should be added, are aimed more directly at the training of the Christian teacher than at the establishment of a Christian school. There is considerable doubt as to whether he himself ever dreamed of seeing his ideal embodied in actual educational institutions. It is nevertheless true, that out of his proposal was to come the medieval university in its original form. The unmistakable queen of the suggested curriculum was theology, to which, in the end, all the arts and sciences were clearly reduced.

Such a conception was eminently suited to the requirements of medieval Christendom; but it was subject to criticism from without and hence less well adapted to a situation in which faith has ceased to function as a universally accepted norm. It received its first great challenge when Aristotelian philosophy in its pure or pre-Christian form penetrated into the West chiefly through the intermediary of the Arabic philosophers of

the Middle Ages. To cope with the problem, a new arrangement was devised whereby the profane disciplines were granted an autonomy which they never enjoyed in the Augustinian scheme. One began to speak, not of a single Christian wisdom into which the partial wisdom of the pagan philosophers could be absorbed, but of two wisdoms, one rational or philosophic and the other theological, the former of course subordinated to the latter, but each one being free in principle if not always in practice from any intrusion on the part of the other.

The same basic conception was revived somewhat artificially when Catholic higher education was reorganized in the nineteenth century. It is still by and large the conception which tacitly or expressly underlies most Catholic colleges today. To cite only one example, one reads in the new statutes of a recently "reformed" Catholic college:

> In conducting its business and establishing its policy, the Board of Trustees shall act at all times in a manner consistent with the goals and purposes of the College as a Catholic institution of higher learning. Although admission to the academic community is by no means restricted to Catholics, the College shall maintain an integral program of studies which embodies the traditional and contemporary Roman Catholic philosophy of education. This means specifically: 1) that the twin disciplines of theology and philosophy, *which represent the core of Christian higher education,* shall be given due prominence and occupy within the curriculum a position such that the entire intellectual and cultural life of the College may be enlivened and sustained by them...

The text then goes on to specify the role of the particular religious order under whose auspices the college in question is operated. The events of recent years, if nothing else compel us to raise the question as to whether such a conception can still be fitted to a world in which the once magic words, "theology" and "philosophy," have obviously lost their power of persuasion. It is sad perhaps but true that one can no longer assume a favorable prejudice in regard to theology on the part of a sizable portion of the student body. The same applies in a different way to philosophy, which tends all too often to become a simple specialization among other specializations, and which in any event is not likely to be erotic enough to elicit from most students the sustained effort that it requires in order to be assimilated in a profitable way.

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE NEW CATHOLIC COLLEGE

If neither theology nor philosophy as they have been taught with rare exceptions can qualify in practice as the core or the unifying element of the modern Catholic college, by what could they be replaced? My very general answer, which would require a lengthier explanation than these brief remarks allow, is that a more radical approach than any of those yet tried has become both necessary and possible. That new approach consists basically in restoring philosophy to its native human context, or, stated in slightly different terms, in organizing the academic life of the school, whether formally or informally, in such a way that it would have as its heart of hearts, not philosophy *tout court* but political philosophy in its original and most noble sense.

The difficulty that we immediately encounter is that the expression "political philosophy" either corresponds to no precise reality in the minds of most of our contemporaries or is associated by them with a kind of problem-solving activity in which both the problems and the solutions are dictated by mindless ideologies. On the whole, political philosophy has not fared well in the Christian world, for the simple reason that, as long as society itself was predominantly Christian or infused with Christian ideals, there seemed to be no pressing need for thematic reflection on man as he lives without specialty in the city. With the breakdown of sociological Christendom, its study is once again imperative. The situation of the Christian in the modern world has often been compared to that of the early Christians, who were themselves only a small minority in the midst of a predominantly hostile or indifferent world. But, while helpful in some ways, the comparison may be misleading in others. The early Christians lived in a society in which Christianity was a totally new phenomenon. Furthermore, that society was a religious society. Christianity was not rejected because of its religious character but because of its newness. Today, it is rejected not because it is new but because it is old and identified with an order of things which, in the name of intellectual probity, our enlightened contemporaries no longer find acceptable. It is at best a comforting illusion, to be discarded in the name of a new fortitude which looks with serenity but without hope upon a life characterized by its meaninglessness, its forlornness, and its exposedness.

This unique phenomenon does not require that traditional values be jettisoned, but it does impose on

Christian educators the necessity of approaching them in a different and more radical manner. The approach that I have in mind is neither dogmatic nor skeptical. It constitutes an effort to go back to the beginning and, indeed, to the beginning of the beginning, thereby making possible, at least on the part of those who are capable of it, a fresh understanding, and hence a genuine recovery, of these traditional values. What distinguishes it from the earlier approaches to which I have alluded is that it is not in the first instance explicitly Christian but only implicitly or potentially so. It neither presupposes nor imposes the faith. In that sense, it exhibits a greater respect for the freedom of the individual and affords a new opportunity for the creative exercise of that freedom.

Because it is more neutral than either of the alternative approaches, it stands a better chance of unifying the various segments of the college community and of introducing students in a thoughtful way to the real issues implied in the protracted debate among the greatest thinkers of the Western tradition. It is broad enough to encompass all the legitimate disciplines currently being taught in our colleges, and it has the obvious advantage of providing a desperately needed means by which these disciplines could be brought back into some kind of healthy relationship with one another. Among other things, it helps students to overcome—or, if not to overcome, at least to understand—the nagging dichotomies of modern education, including the stultifying divorce between the sciences and the humanities. By the same token, it goes a long way toward restoring the balance between the high level of competence required by the technical advances of our time and the demands of a truly liberal education, or toward laying the groundwork for an education that not only gives students the professional training they seek but produces in them the root and branch change which was once thought to be the ultimate goal of the educational process.

The approach in question does not require that the instructor conceal or bracket his own religious convictions, if he has them; it merely requires that the evidence for the materials presented be not drawn explicitly or implicitly from one's commitment of faith. This is not to suggest for one moment that there should be no courses offered which build explicitly on the foundation of faith, but only that the unification of a divided and pluralistic community is better accomplished by placing at the center of the academic program a series of courses which are not, either by their own nature or by reason of the particular circumstances of our time, divisive and controversial.

In the few places where they have been properly taught, these courses have proved to be the only reasonably sure way of motivating students to reflect generally about themselves and the whole of society, of educating their tastes and their minds, and of satisfying their longings for an insight into the most serious problems. It is a sorry reflection in the state of modern education that the deepest satisfactions experienced by some of our best students have come from an untutored involvement in movements and issues which bear no direct relationship to the things they are made to study in college. One is all too easily inclined to blame students themselves for the predictable outcome of such involvements. The harsher and more sobering truth is that there was hardly anything in the education received by these students which could impart life to their standards or substance to their convictions, serve as a model of seriousness and thoroughness, and restore a sense of dignity to the learning process. Above all, there was little in that education which could give a measure of satisfaction to their legitimate craving for training in what most concerns them and of providing the kind of overview which cannot be achieved simply by totaling the various specialties to which they are introduced. Granted that there is no longer any substantive agreement even among educators about ultimate principles and the overall ends of human life, institutions of higher learning could still be the places where these issues are debated, where the knowledge necessary to become an informed participant in the debate is acquired, and where one may achieve true freedom by becoming aware of alternatives that are rarer and more gratifying than any of those which tend to proliferate in our day.

There is a story about an old professor who had spent the whole of his professional life at Oxford and who had often been heard to say that he had no intention of ever leaving the place. Colleagues and students alike admired him for what they took to be his utter dedication to the university, until someone thought of asking him why he was so eager to end his days at Oxford. The reason, he replied, was that at Oxford the difference between life and death was almost imperceptible. It would be presumptuous on my part to argue that the difference between life and death in our colleges has become barely perceptible. The fact that the question can be raised and has often been raised in our day may be the sign either of a failure of nerve or of a growing awareness of a situation which can only be remedied by resolute action. Bearing in mind that the question has to do not so much with the survival of Catholic institutions as with the quality and meaning of their life, one could perhaps say of their future what Winston Churchill once said about victory in war: It is impossible to guarantee it; it is only possible to deserve it.

NOTES

1 Editor's Note: "The New Catholic College" originally appeared ca. 1970 in a mimeographed pamphlet together with Oscar E. Remick's "Assumption: An Analysis." Both articles were an attempt to address, in the wake of the turbulent 1960s, the future of Assumption College. Assumption College is a small Catholic liberal arts college run by the Assumptionist order (of which Fr. Fortin was a member) in Worcester, Massachusetts. Both Fortin and Remick were faculty members of the college at the time.

2 Editor's Note: Veblen's facetious subtitle did not end up in print. The full title was eventually: *Higher Learning in America: A Memorandum on the Conduct of Universities by Business Men (1918)*.

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AN ACADEMIC APPROACH TO THE TEACHING OF THEOLOGY

The approach that I have been asked to speak about may be described, for want of a better term, as objective.[1] It is not necessarily opposed to the approaches that have been or will be presented by the other discussants, except to the extent to which it or they might lay claim to exclusivity. In my own mind, at any rate, it does not constitute an alternative to any of these approaches. If it has any merit at all, it may rather be seen as either presupposed by them or required as a complement to them.

"OBJECTIVE" THEOLOGY

By the objective approach to the teaching of theology, I mean that approach which has as its primary aim to set forth and make intelligible to the present-day student the content of the Christian faith as understood by the mainstream of Christian theology since the beginning. This does not imply that the truths of faith belong in the same category as such truths as are accessible to the unassisted human reason or that our understanding of them is exhausted by means of simple intellectual apprehension. Nor does it imply that these truths are not susceptible of further development, in such a way that they need only to be handed down to our students and the students of our students in the form *ne varietur* that they happen to have achieved at some particular moment of history. What it does imply is that the substance of these doctrines is such that they may be grasped by the human mind and that any successful attempt at a further elaboration is contingent on our ability, however limited, to understand them as they were understood by their classic exponents.

Perhaps the simplest way to clarify the meaning of this "objective" approach is to distinguish it from what might be called, inaccurately and again for the sake of convenience, the "subjective" approach to the study and teaching of theology. The word "subjective" in the present context refers to that type of theological thinking which emphasizes the dynamic, experiential, and confrontational element of the Christian faith at the expense of its doctrinal substance and, in its extreme form, denies the permanency of even its most fundamental truths. The roots of this new theology may be discerned in the following statement by Walter Kasper:

> The historical nature of biblical truth calls for a speculative approach which regards history as the ultimate backdrop of truth. If speculative theology adopts this outlook, it will be drawing closer to a basic tendency in present-day philosophy—the tendency to view being as time and time as being. This revolutionary "temporal" outlook in modern thought may pose dangers to theology; but it also offers theology new possibilities that are more in line with the biblical outlook on truth and reality than a static philosophy of nature and perduring essences would be.
>
> Right now, of course, we cannot fathom the full implications of this revolutionary new approach. We are starting out on a new road, experiencing both the birth pangs and the joy of a new life.
>
> We already have a new outlook on being, which has moved beyond the categories of cosmos and nature and has come to regard freedom, time and history as the most comprehensive framework. In this outlook, we are not dealing with accidental changes in a perduring system of essences; on the contrary, nature and being only become real within the all-embracing cloak of history. Thus the theologian can look on the mystery of God's gracious freedom unfolding in history to the ultimate ground and depth of all

reality.[2]

However much this newer approach may be adjusted to the needs of the age, it contains within itself certain difficulties which would seem to preclude any uncritical acceptance of it on the part of theologians. Its inspiration is clearly drawn from a philosophy that may be regarded as the fulfillment as well as the radical transformation of the whole development of modern thought since its inception. That philosophy asserts, in essence, the relative character of the views of all ages. In it the problematic character of modernity comes to the fore, since by proclaiming the relativity of all views, historicism proclaims its own relativity. This realization inevitably led to a questioning of the naïve faith in the modern view and in historicism itself as a characteristically modern phenomenon. If such is the case, one may detect a touch of bitter irony in the fact that Christian theologians should be casting their lot with historicism precisely at a time when the historical premise has come to be viewed less and less as a foundation and more and more as a problem in outer theological space.

Even if one were to accept the historicist view, however, one would still have to begin, it seems to me, with a traditional presentation of the Christian teaching. Existential theology comes into being as a transformation of traditional theology and is predicated on an awareness of the inadequacy of that theology. But one cannot understand the transformation without some understanding of the original form. In order to give an account of its own doing, if for no other reason, existential theology is thus compelled to take an interest in traditional theology.

What complicates the problem from that point of view, however, is that the expression “traditional theology” is itself ambiguous and in need of clarification. Traditional theology as commonly understood today is traditional only in regard to the theology that has tended to supersede it in recent years. The actual truth of the matter is that, far from being traditional, it represents a substantial departure from theology in the original sense. This much is already suggested by the use of such terms as “dogmatic theology” or “systematic theology” to designate its core. Dogmatic theology, as we know, is a relatively recent invention. It dates from the seventeenth century and comes into being as a substitute for the combination of classical philosophy and biblical thought which had characterized the older theology. Its appearance coincides with the emergence of modern thought, to whose modes and principles it sought to adapt itself and whose doctrinaire character it gradually came to share. What the expression conveys, for better or for worse, is that the Christian theology of the period had lost sight of its originative impulse and reshaped itself in accordance with an externally victorious and increasingly successful modern science.

Similar remarks would have to be made concerning the term “systematic theology,” which is also a child of its time. Like the expression “dogmatic theology,” it too belongs to the seventeenth century and reflects the same basic preoccupations. The word “system” had previously found a wide variety of uses in the fields of astronomy, music, medicine, and the like, but never before had it been applied to the realm of thought. Suddenly, systems of theology begin to appear, as do systems of logic and ethics. Only in that period does theologizing become identified with the producing of “systems of theology.” These systems were essentially attempts to harmonize the Christian teaching with the new physics and the new mechanics of the time. Any such harmonizing requires the construction of a system, that is to say, of a whole which encompasses and unites disparate parts. The problem then becomes one of finding a foundation or pillars on which such a work of art or such a construction may be made to rest. The result was a baroque scholasticism, which is not without grandeur when viewed within the framework of the history of theology, but which was marked by a kind of spiritual poverty and inner tensions that were never resolved. It is not surprising, in retrospect, that the men of the time should have sought the spiritual nourishment that they craved in mysticism rather than in the theology of the schools.

This situation was improved perhaps but not radically changed by the scholastic revival of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and by contemporary Transcendental Thomism. It would not be difficult to show how in neo-scholasticism the same unresolved tensions are perpetuated. One finds an illustration of it in the works of Maritain, whose scholasticism is marked by the same typically modern dualism of a non-teleological natural science and a teleological science of man inherited from the Christian tradition.

This phenomenon may account for the failure of both Neo-Thomists and Transcendental Thomists to establish their claims. The only difference between them seems to be that one is willing to go further than the other in adjusting the claims of Christianity to those of modern thought. It is indicative of the Catholic theology of the forties and fifties that its liveliest debates were exhausted by the open and at times bitter conflict between the two groups. Both positions finally appeared as halfway houses, which may have had their practical advantages and served a useful purpose for a time, but which met with little success in non-

theological circles and which would eventually come under severe fire from within the Christian fold. In this regard, Dewart's critique of Transcendental Thomism is very much to the point, though I am not sure to what extent his challenge has been met or even understood by contemporary theologians.[3]

The problems that continued to plague the house of theology throughout the modern period were not relieved but compounded by the further distinction between dogmatic theology and historical theology. According to this famous and still normative distinction, the task of the dogmatic or systematic theologian is to explicate and expound the teachings of the Christian faith in themselves and in their interrelations as well as in their relation to non-theological doctrines. To the historian devolves the somewhat less glamorous task of determining the position of this or that particular Christian writer in regard to the doctrines at hand, without pronouncing himself on the validity of that position; as if it were possible to understand a theologian without theologizing or to establish the thought of a thinker without evaluating it. It may be noted in passing that historical theology, like its sister, dogmatic or systematic theology, is itself a product of the modern period, having arisen at a time when the Christian classics ceased to be read as authoritative sources and had become by and large either objects of mere historical interest or theological *loci* to be exploited for confessional or apologetic purposes. The trend thus established eventually led to the substitution of ephemeral authors and popular journalism for the role once played by the classics of the Christian tradition. Just how much this has done to enhance the sagging respectability of Christian theology has understandably become a matter of considerable doubt to many thoughtful persons in our own day. Until such time as these persistent dichotomies are overcome and their premises unveiled, it is unlikely that anyone will be able to inject much new life into the corpse, not to say the *membra disjecta*, of Christian theology.

What is needed to remedy the situation is a study of classical Christianity which would attempt to understand its best exponents on their own terms, instead of scouring their works for an anticipation or a confirmation of the views bequeathed to us by virtue of a mysterious and elusive historical dispensation. Needless to say, an endeavor of this kind is more difficult than it sounds. It does not suffice to say that one should go back to the great authors of the Christian tradition and read them with an open and free mind. The problem lies precisely in achieving the necessary freedom of mind. One does not divest himself at will of one's most deeply ingrained prejudices. In this respect, it may be suggested that openness to the truth is not so much the precondition as the outcome and the reward of a certain type of inquiry.

Fortunately, the way in which this more genuine recovery of the Christian tradition in its entirety may be effected has been opened up indirectly by the most influential and probably the greatest thinker of our century, Martin Heidegger. On the basis of Nietzsche's epoch-making insights, Heidegger became convinced that the whole tradition of Western thought, represented in his day by Husserl, had gone astray since the beginning. In his attempt to think through the problem raised by Nietzsche, he was led back to the origins of that tradition in Plato and especially Aristotle, whom he read with a thoroughness that had been unmatched since the Middle Ages. What gave to that study its particular importance was that the questioning of the tradition required the questioning of the traditional understanding of the tradition. The result was an understanding of Greek philosophy that was not mediated by a long tradition of Christian scholarship and evinced a freshness that was mostly lacking in the conventional interpretations. Heidegger's purpose was to uproot the tradition stemming from Aristotle, or, more precisely, to discern its essential limitation. It appeared to some of his students, however, that the fresh understanding of Aristotle which he achieved did not necessarily lead to the rejection of Aristotle's fundamental positions. Be that as it may, the attempted recovery and radical assessment of the entire tradition of Western philosophy paved the way for an equally fresh understanding of the Christian tradition to which the encounter between biblical thought and Greek philosophy had given rise.

It is hardly necessary to add that such a radical revision of our grasp of that tradition has barely begun. The encouraging fact—and in an age when there are so few encouraging facts, one may be tempted to welcome it with greater joy—is that some tools have become available which were not present a short generation ago.

HOW TO TEACH THEOLOGY

All that has been said thus far relates to the content of the so-called objective approach to the teaching of theology. The question, however, is not only What do I teach, but How?

It is obvious that, in addition to its own inherent difficulties, Christian theology today faces a new set of difficulties arising from the condition of its hearers. The single most important phenomenon to which one can advert in this connection is the impossibility of assuming an unequivocal commitment of faith on the

part of all or most students. Students, even Catholic students, are not presuppositionless angels, any more than their teachers. If appearances are not too deceiving, not too many of them are angels, and it is doubtful whether any of them have been completely immunized against the pervasive influence of the modern critique of religion. The wit who defined education as the art of casting artificial pearls before real swine may well have been thinking of teachers of theology. The line that separates belief from unbelief has never been easy to establish; but, assuming that it is possible to speak of it at all, it is more likely today to run through each individual than through society at large. This means, in practice, that if theology is to be presented persuasively, its relevance to human life and experience will have to be demonstrated more clearly than was done heretofore. Hence the necessity of restoring theology to its primitive form and of rendering it plausible and attractive to people who not only know little about it but are often negatively disposed toward it. In a word, what is called for is a theology which, like early Christian theology, is "political" in its mode of treatment, or, more concretely stated, a theology which appeals in the first instance to concerns other than the concern for truth.

It is here, more than anywhere else perhaps, that the contacts between the approach that I have been advocating and the various other approaches discussed here today become apparent.

This is not to suggest for one moment that, by using such a method, success is automatically guaranteed. One could broaden the question and ask whether it is even desirable to teach theology to everybody or to everybody who wants it. I know of some teachers who think that theology is essentially a graduate subject and that what passes for theology on the undergraduate level would be better designated by some other name. And yet, if theology is not taught to undergraduates, the supply of graduate students may be drastically reduced. In any event, the current democratization of higher education has more or less committed us to the goal of accommodating everyone. And under such circumstances, it is doubtful whether any method could prove universally effective. Perhaps this is part of the price that one must be prepared to pay for whatever advantages may yet accrue to us for opening to all knockers the doors of the inner sanctum.

NOTES

1 Editor's Note: The occasion on which this talk was given has not been ascertained. Judging by the manuscript's type and the citation of Kasper's 1969 *Methods of Dogmatic Theology,* it most likely dates from the early 1970s.

2 *The Methods of Dogmatic Theology,* trans. John Drury (New York: Paulist Press, 1969), 54-55.

3 Leslie Dewart, "On Transcendental Thomism," *Continuum* 6 (1968), 389-401. The essay was later included as an appendix in Dewart's *The Foundations of Belief* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 499-522.

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MORAL VALUES

At no point is the confusion that reigns in the minds of many of our contemporaries more visible than in what is now referred to as the domain of "values," where the old convictions have gradually given way to a pervasive uncertainty that has few parallels in history.[1] Ours is a society whose traditional patterns of behavior have been severely disrupted and robbed of all the public support that they once enjoyed, a society in which all too often the only thing that can be taken for granted is that nothing can be taken for granted.

Sociologists frequently point to the technological revolution as the root cause of the uneasiness generated by this situation. It is true that human beings have never been required to adjust so rapidly to so many profound changes, and it is equally true that they have never been confronted with such a vast array of new possibilities among which they are paradoxically both free and compelled to choose. What creates an even greater problem, however, is that the rationality of the principles governing these choices is constantly being called into question by some of our leading thinkers. Moral values, we are often told, are not self-evidently or demonstrably good or bad in themselves; they are good or bad only by virtue of our "holding" them to be so. Unlike facts, they lie beyond the pale of rational discourse and have no basis other than one's decision to accept them. Any attempt to justify them on objective grounds is simply dismissed as an exercise in ideology or an unconscious rationalization. As the author of the most widely read theological book of the '60s once put it: "In our time the Copernican revolution has reached out to incorporate everything into its sweep. All things are relative. Everything 'depends on how you look at it.'"[2]

The same relativistic attitude is reflected in the tentative way in which people now routinely express themselves. One only "happens" to be something—say, a Roman Catholic—or to have a "preference" for something, or to be "into" something. The unstated (and usually unrecognized) premise is that one could just as easily and with equal reason be "into" something altogether different. As long as these preferences, subjective as they may be, are harmless enough, the situation need not cause any undue alarm. It becomes more worrisome when, to paraphrase Peter Berger, what one is "into" is not mountain climbing or yoga but drugs, theft, or rape.

This is obviously not to suggest that all of our students are already confirmed relativists, indifferent to the distinction between right and wrong, cynical, and unconcerned about the welfare of others. Their outlooks tend to vary a great deal and any endeavor to classify them without making a more thorough study of them would be futile or misleading. Many of them come from excellent backgrounds and are highly dedicated, as is evident from their eagerness to enroll in courses that involve them in various kinds of community projects. But if the idealism of the '60s has not completely disappeared, it is not quite as conspicuous as it was a few years ago. The successors of what was then called the "new breed" have become more pragmatic, competitive, and career-oriented. The new trend is unmistakable and, here as elsewhere, it has already had a profound effect on campus life.

In an attempt to restore a measure of cohesion to our fragmented moral universe, educators have lately taken to offering courses on ethics in ever larger numbers to an ever larger number of students. A recent Hastings Report on *The Teaching of Ethics in Higher Education* reveals that over 11,000 such courses are currently being taught on the undergraduate and graduate levels in this country. In the opinion of the authors of the Report, the number is still insufficient and a greater effort will have to be made in order to achieve the desired result. The question is whether, far from helping us to find our way out of the moral disarray that it laments, the Report is not itself so committed to the principle of ethical relativism as to undo at one end what it tries to accomplish at the other. Commenting on some of its proposals, William Bennett, the new Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, writes:

> Heeding the counsel of such "experts," we have now adopted educational programs in this country that seem to be aimed quite simply at cultural suicide. A child entering school in America in the 1980s can now begin his education with "instruction" in values-clarification at the elementary level, wherein he will learn that "there is no right and wrong" and that "life is a lovely banquet" in which he can take what he likes. Then he can go on to high school and engage in "cognitive moral development" where he will learn to question all forms of authority, particularly that of the family, whose "conditioning," as this report calls it, he will learn to recognize for what it is. From there, he can go on to college where he will learn to question the "permanent validity" of the American cultural ideals—that is, if he has ever heard of them.[3]

Bennett's assessment may sound unduly harsh or negative, but it has the merit of drawing our attention to what has been for some time and remains the single most important problem confronting us in this area.

A more promising beginning could perhaps be made by attending to other recent developments whose impact is being felt with increasing strength in both inner and outer academic circles. One of these is the emergence of a new and powerful rights movement, which owes much of its appeal to the fact that it strives to inject a genuinely moral note into the old rights theory by stressing the intrinsic worth and dignity of the human person. Such is the approach favored, among others, by John Finnis, whose widely acclaimed book, *Natural Law and Natural Rights,* is a systematic attempt to restate the traditional Catholic teaching in accordance with the pressing needs of our time and the highest standards of analytical thought. Although the language of rights easily lends itself to abuse, it cannot be denied that it constitutes an original and uniquely modern vehicle with which to formulate the demands of justice and of a just social order. In view of the importance that the rights doctrine has assumed in our time, it is barely conceivable that our students should not be made aware of its far-reaching implications.

Mention could likewise be made of a second trend which has found an eloquent spokesman in the person of Prof. Alasdair Maclntyre and which seeks to restore the notions of virtue and character to the position of prominence that they once occupied in the ethical tradition. Less juridical in its orientation, it views morality as first and foremost a matter of objective taste rather than of deductive reasoning, and it relies on the best kind of education for the cultivation of that taste. Its main concern is not so much to spell out in detail the minimum requirements of justice as to review or reaccredit an ideal of human excellence that is best defined in terms of the proper order of the soul or what used to be called the "good life," a notion that receives short shrift in the modern rights doctrine.

How these two different approaches can be brought into harmony with each other is the theme of some of the more serious discussions that have been taking place in various forums throughout the country. What is most significant about them is that they both represent a shift away from the deadening neutrality of the modern scientific enterprise and a return to substantive moral issues as they manifest themselves in the life of the individual and the political community. They thus open up the way for a new, more vital, and at the same time intellectually competent articulation of the realm of ethics in all of its immense diversity.

Moral matters are complex by their very nature and have become even more so as a result of the growing complexity of modern life. No one can ignore or remain indifferent to the thorny issues now dealt with under such rubrics as "business ethics," "sexual ethics," and "medical ethics." It may be that, as time goes on, more courses in these crucial areas will have to be introduced. To leave it at that, however, would be to narrow rather than broaden the scope of the discipline and perhaps run the risk of reducing it to a specialty among others. What our students lack and most need at the present moment is a vision of the whole from which the various decisions that they are called upon to make draw their ultimate significance.

It was formerly thought to be the function of the university to provide such a vision to generate clarity about the goals of human existence, and to present a synoptic view of the higher alternatives to the pursuit of which one could dedicate one's life. As was said earlier, the consensus that once prevailed concerning these basic questions has disappeared, but this only makes it more imperative that today's student be given the opportunity to explore in a thoughtful and informed way the intellectual roots of the different positions that compete for his allegiance. A Catholic university such as ours may wish to do more, but it certainly cannot afford to do less. In our view, a substantial portion of its energies and resources should be used to support and intensify the efforts that are already being made along these lines and, by fostering a spirit of serious inquiry, guarantee that their impact will be felt more broadly than has thus far been the case among our students.

NOTES

1 Editor's Note: "Moral Values" was written on behalf of the subcommittee on Religious Belief and Practice for the *Report of the University Planning Council: Societal Changes Salient to Boston College 1981-1982* (Boston: Boston College, 1983), 3-4.

2 Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 27.

3 "Getting Ethics," *Commentary* 70:6 (December 1980), 65.

V

ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE

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THE ANGUISH OF UNITY: A ROMAN CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

The fact that for the first time in 168 years the United Church of Christ should be holding the closing session of its annual convention on the campus of a Roman Catholic institution is itself a symptom of the dramatic changes of which we have suddenly become the privileged, if at times bewildered, witnesses.- Ecumenism is still for most of us a new and exciting experience; so new, in fact, that many of the words we use in speaking about it have not yet found their way into our dictionaries. Two years ago, a young student of mine happened to read in the paper that the late Father Gustav Weigel, whose death had just been announced, was an ecclesiologist and an ecumenist. Never having heard of such an animal, he proceeded to look up these words in Webster, only to discover that ecclesiology was "the science of the building and the decorating of churches"—a definition that hardly seemed to fit the context of the article. As for "ecumenism," it is not even listed, and neither, of course, are its variants and derivatives, such as "ecumenicity," "ecumenist," "ecumenicist" and, as someone once suggested, "ecumeniac." Theologians themselves still have not come to any agreement as to how the word "ecumenism" should be pronounced. I am told that the authoritative pronunciation is "EC-u-men-ism." Most people seem to prefer "ec-U-men-ism." And I once heard a foreign scholar speak for a whole hour on what he persisted in calling "You-come-in-ism." Whatever the correct pronunciation may be—and I don't think anyone in this country is likely to lose much sleep over it—the fact remains that within a remarkably short period of time ecumenism has grown into one of the major theological concerns of our age.

In the few minutes allotted to me I should like to discuss our chosen topic, "The Anguish of Unity," under three headings: The popularity of ecumenism, the current crisis of ecumenism, and the hidden dimension of ecumenism.

THE POPULARITY OF ECUMENISM

Much had been written on the subject of church unity between the two wars, at which time the so-called New Theology had already begun to take shape. But the real breakthrough, at least as far as Roman Catholicism as a whole is concerned, did not occur until the early sixties when Vatican II was convoked; and for this breakthrough, Catholics have Protestants to thank at least as much as themselves. The Council, we know, was not originally intended as a means of promoting Christian unity. At that early date any declaration to that effect could easily have been interpreted as sheer arrogance on the part of the Roman church by other Christian bodies. But Pope John did use a word that struck a chord in the minds and hearts of all Christians. He spoke of "reform," by which he meant above all the updating of the church or its aggiornamentation, to use another word that has since become part of our new vocabulary. Now the word "reform" is not a specifically Protestant word. It is a good old-fashioned Christian word, first used by St. Paul and by the Church Fathers in the sense of personal or individual reform, and later by Gregory VII in the sense of church or collective reform. Thus, even in this second sense it antedates the Protestant Reformation by the safe margin of some five centuries. The important point, however, is that the word did have ecumenical overtones and it did much in the late fifties and early sixties to orient the Council in an ecumenical direction.

Another factor which played a decisive role at that time was the overwhelmingly sympathetic response of many Protestant churches to the announcement of the Council and their willingness to be present as observers at the sessions of the Council when it was finally convened. Moreover, it is no secret today that their role at the Council went beyond that of passive observers. The upshot of these developments was that the entire first phase of the Council was permeated with, and indeed dominated by the spirit of ecumenism, in a manner and to an extent that could not have been foreseen when the Council was first announced.

An organizational structure like that of the Catholic Church may have liabilities at times, but it also has its advantages, not the least of which is the ability to gain rapid support for a new idea or a new course of

action. Once the Council had gone ecumenical, the whole Church went ecumenical. I am in no position to comment on the status of ecumenism within the Protestant churches today; but if I read the events of those years correctly, it may be one of the ironies of recent church history that Protestants were able to give to Roman Catholicism what Protestants have not yet succeeded in giving themselves.

It is true that the Council later turned its attention to other problems, such as the role of the Church in the modern world. As a result, the whole question of ecumenism seemed to fade into the background. The reason, however is not that ecumenism had lost any of its importance; it is rather that, in the minds of a great majority of the people involved in these discussions both in inner and in outer conciliar space, ecumenism was here to stay. Division had ceased to appear as a necessity and an unchangeable destiny. Unity had come to be regarded, in principle if not in deed, as an accomplished fact of modern history, however distant the prospect of final reunion, if it should ever take place, may continue to be.

The very title of our discussion suggests as much. That title, “The Anguish of Unity,” was taken from a small volume published a few years ago by my confrère and former colleague, Father George Tavard. The point that the author tried to make was that unity was or should be the concern of every Christian, that it could serve to orient one’s piety, and that there was a direct relationship between ecumenical concern and a deepening of one’s spiritual life. Although the book caused no great stir among critics and buyers at the time, its thesis is one that has come to be widely accepted on all sides. Disunity is no longer something to be taken for granted or about which one can afford to be complacent; it is a cause of suffering and a scandal to be removed, within the limits of possibility. This much had become clear at least by the end of the second session of the Council.

THE CRISIS OF ECUMENISM

It would be naive or foolish, however, to think that just because ecumenism has become fashionable, an adequate solution to the problems that it raises has been found. The true magnitude of these problems is only now becoming apparent to us, and as it does so, the enthusiasm and euphoria generated by the Council have tended to give way to a more sober and realistic approach to the question of ecumenism as a whole. There is reason to believe that for Catholics as well as for Protestants the ecumenical movement is about to enter into a new and critical phase, that it has yet to pass its major hurdle.

The difficulty that we face does not stem merely or primarily from ignorance or prejudice or private interest. If one were to attempt to formulate that difficulty in one sentence, one would have to say that on the highest level it lies in the painful tension that ecumenism has created between the desire for unity on the one hand and faithfulness to a noble and cherished tradition on the other. Only the man who knows the meaning of loyalty can feel the anguish of unity; only the man who prizes faithfulness can experience in his flesh the pangs of the new birth to which he is being summoned; only the man who senses the value of a commitment which alone gives depth and dignity to human life can bear the full weight of the new responsibilities that are being placed upon him.

For faithfulness to a living tradition means more than the simple preservation of that tradition. It means faithfulness to its spirit, to the originative impulse to which it owes its existence and which continues to be operative in it. And since life is change, it means renewal and adaptation as a requirement of faithfulness and as the sole means of preserving that tradition in its vitality and its integrity. It thus implies the realization that conservatism is not a proper response to the highest demands of faithfulness. Mere conservatism is not only self-defeating, it is in the end self-contradictory. It commits the typical mistake of concealing the fact that the continuous and changing tradition which is so greatly cherished would never have come into being through conservation, or without discontinuities, innovations, and, as it were, sacrileges committed at the beginning of that tradition and at least tacitly repeated in its course.

More briefly and more clearly stated, true fidelity to a tradition seeks not so much to repeat indefinitely what the great men of former ages have done but to do what they themselves would prescribe if they were among us today. It is not nostalgic but in its own way creative. It hears its own call to greatness and refuses to believe that greatness is confined to a heroic but inimitable past. It will not allow the dead to bury the living or cause the latter to be cast in the role of mere *epigoni.* It will never be so impressed by the accomplishments of its predecessors that it no longer sees the challenges of the present. What it fears above all else is the general paralysis that threatens any position the moment it allows itself to become petrified, lifeless, or submerged by the weight of its own past.

For this task the ecumenical movement has found Roman Catholics in general ill-prepared. Our modern world has shown an extraordinary readiness to accept change, and it has developed a philosophy of change which enables us to adapt with relative ease to the rapidly changing patterns of modern life. For this very

reason we have frowned upon change in matters of religion; we have looked upon religion as the one stable element in the midst of "all this flux," the blue chip to which one clings in the midst of a frantic trading of values. What Roman Catholics need most at the present moment is precisely a theology of change; a *theology* that will help us to distinguish between the living and the dead, the gold and the dross, the flame and the ashes; a theology that will enable us to navigate between the Scylla of relativism and the Charybdis of doctrinal immobilism, and thus insure not only the truth but the relevance of our genuinely prophetic insights. Divine truth, after all, is not a bundle tucked under the arms of the Apostles and passed on like a football from one age to another. It is something that must be understood, appropriated, and interpreted anew by each successive generation of Christians; and anyone who is willing to make that effort may soon find himself shedding a few snake-skins along the way.

THE HIDDEN DIMENSION OF ECUMENISM

The task before us is rendered all the more urgent by what I have chosen to call the hidden dimension of the ecumenical movement, namely, the impact of modern secular thought on Christianity. I refer not to any specific theological or para-theological fad, such as the current brouhaha about the death of God, but to the deeper issues which these fads both reflect and partially conceal, and which persist once the fad has subsided.

The Council literally stumbled upon these issues during its last session when the draft proposal of what was to become the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* came up for discussion. The document had originally been conceived as a kind of grab bag in which would be placed a number of topical questions that could not conveniently be treated elsewhere, such as war and peace, marriage and the family, and the problems of modern technological society. The implications of these questions turned out to be far greater than anyone had anticipated. Before it knew it the Council had a lion by the tail. The whole issue of modernity had come dramatically to the fore. For the first time in its history, the Roman Catholic Church was openly coming to grips with the vast problem of its relation to our modern, secular, desacralized and disenchanted world.

The nature of that problem is not far to seek. Anyone who has been in contact with our younger generation of students knows what questions these students in increasingly large numbers are asking: not to what Christian church or denomination one should belong, but why one should be a Christian in the first place; not what Bible one should use, but why one should even read the Bible; not how and in what language one should worship, but why one should engage in liturgical worship; not what authority one should follow, but why one should submit to any authority; not what one should believe, but why modern man should believe at all. These are the questions that have become characteristic of our age, and they lie deeper than any of the issues that have traditionally divided us. What they suggest is the need for a common approach to the common problems that face all the churches.

I am not recommending for one moment the formation of a united front or a kind of coalition against the onslaught of modernity. There are better and purer motives for seeking unity than fear or panic. Genuine unity will never be a simple matter of opportunism or the fruit of a compromise on the level of principles. It could well be, however, that the current crisis will provide the incentive needed to raise once again certain fundamental questions of which we have lost sight in the heat and din of our intramural theological disputes. If and when it does, we will have taken what may yet prove to be our most important step toward the goal of final reunification.[1]

NOTES

1 Editor's Note: "The Anguish of Unity: A Roman Catholic Perspective," was given on May 13, 1967, at the 168th Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ, held at Assumption College, Worcester, Mass. It was published as a mimeographed pamphlet along with Dr. Oscar E. Remick's presentation, also entitled "anguish of Unity." In the same year, Fortin and Remick, a minister of the United Church of Christ, co-founded the Ecumenical Institute of Religious Studies at Assumption College.

22

THE ECUMENICAL VENTURE

It is a tribute to Sister Mary Francis Regis' faith in the power of the Holy Spirit that she has scheduled a session on ecumenism as part of this year's institute and an even greater tribute to that faith that she should have invited me to speak on the subject.[1] The greatest benefit to be derived from our session, I take it, lies in the mutually enlightening exchange of ideas in which we propose to engage. I, of course, am here as the expert, which probably means that I know less about the matter at hand than most of the people in this room. When I was in college many years ago, my fellow students and I were made to listen to all kinds of experts brought in to lecture to us on a wide variety of topics. We were never told what an expert was, but, as nearly as most of us were able to make out, an expert was a jerk from out of town. So much, then, for my credentials. I shall try to present, first of all, a brief assessment of the ecumenical movement, both positive and negative, and then, in the light of that assessment, raise some questions which could provide matter for our discussion. I begin with the negative assessment.

THE NEGATIVE SIDE

There is a general feeling abroad that the ecumenical movement has run into serious difficulties of late. The symptoms of the crisis are undeniable and, so to speak, visible to the naked eye. Archbishop Bernardin put the matter flatly in a report to the Synod of Bishops held in Rome in the fall of last year when he said: "Ecumenism is in danger today."[2] Just a few weeks ago, the *New York Times* carried an article whose title ran clear across the top of the page; it read: "A World Council of Churches Founder Says the Ecumenical Movement Is Still Viable as a Religious Force."[3] The article was a summary of some comments by Dr. Willem Visser't Hooft, the burden of which was that all hope for the success of the movement should not yet be abandoned. The same sobering note is sounded by Father Edward Duff, himself a long-time observer of the ecumenical scene, in another recent article entitled significantly: "Is Ecumenism a Passing Fancy?"

Both Dr. Visser't Hooft and Father Duff are confirmed ecumenists and, needless to say, neither one is ready to concede defeat. Still, if they are at pains to explain that the movement is viable, it must be that its viability is no longer apparent to everybody. One can take pleasure at being told that the patient is not dead, but such news is only mildly comforting. Certain it is that the tone of these two articles, and of many others like them, contrasts sharply with the euphoria of the early and middle sixties. The wild enthusiasms to which we were accustomed then have since become muted and the signs of progress harder to detect than was once thought to be the case.

The causes of the slowdown are, as usual, many and varied. Not the least obvious among them is the adverse effect that the current economic recession has had on church life in this country. This, coupled with the decline in church membership since the late forties and the drying up of traditional sources of income, has forced serious and sometimes drastic cutbacks in most budgets. God is not dead, He is broke or on the verge of bankruptcy. One of the first areas to be affected by these cutbacks has unfortunately been that of ecumenical affairs. A recent study edited by Father David Bowman suggests that there is a direct correlation between the vitality of ecumenical endeavors and the proper staffing of ecumenical agencies.[4] For want of adequate personnel and the necessary financial support, the ecumenical enterprise has languished even in places where it once thrived.

A second reason has to do with the internal difficulties that many and perhaps most of the Christian denominations have experienced in recent years. When ecumenism was launched into its present orbit some fifteen years ago, there was already talk of expanding the movement beyond the narrow confines of Christianity. Encouraged by a number of spectacular breakthroughs, people spoke of a wider ecumenism encompassing all of the great religions and reflecting modern man's aspirations for a united world. The illusory or premature character of these hopes was brought home to us in a somewhat ironic way when deep-seated conflicts began to erupt within the churches themselves. Not only did efforts to bring the

Christian denominations closer to one another appear to founder, but each denomination has had its hands full trying to maintain or restore unity among its own members. The much-publicized rift within certain segments of American Lutheranism, the fracas over the ordination of women in the Episcopal church, and the persistent split between liberals and conservatives within the Roman Catholic fold are all cases in point and furnish ample evidence of this pervasive syndrome. As a result, it became apparent that more thought would have to be given to the practice of ecumenism within one's own house before efforts of a similar nature could become effective on a larger scale, to say nothing of a world-wide scale.

In the meantime, a new crop of problems which had not figured prominently in the earlier debates has come to the fore and has raised the level of tension within the ecumenical community. I refer specifically to such issues as population control, the liberalization of abortion laws, aid to parochial schools, and the access of women to priestly orders. While none of these items would appear to be as central to the question of church unity as such traditionally divisive issues as papal authority, ecclesiastical orders, or church polity, their appeal to the popular imagination may be far greater and the passions that they arouse much stronger than the ones normally associated with less tangible theological positions.

A fourth area of concern has been and remains the disenchantment with the institutional church on the part of a growing number of Christians. The phenomenon may or may not be permanent, but it is typical of our time and strikes at the very heart of the ecumenical movement. To anyone who is convinced that ecclesiastical institutions are obsolete or, worse still, that we live in a post-Christian and hence post-ecumenical age, any talk of reunion is bound to look like just another attempt to rearrange the chairs on the deck of a sinking ship. Although accurate statistics are not readily available and perhaps impossible to gather, one suspects that there are many people who would gladly subscribe to Bishop John A.T. Robinson's famous remark that marriage between old people is necessarily sterile and that one's efforts would be better channeled in other, more productive directions.

To the causes that I have mentioned one should also add the disappointment occasioned by the fact that, despite enormous expenditures of time and effort, the results obtained have been few and insignificant, and that many sincere Christians have been rendered cautious by the legitimate fear that ecumenism leads to a subtle betrayal of one's beliefs.

THE POSITIVE SIDE

The picture that I have painted would be bleak indeed if it were to be taken as an adequate index of the present state of ecumenism. Its very one-sidedness suggests that it needs to be complemented by a review of the positive gains registered during the same period. It is not that easy to determine the health of the ecumenical movement as a whole. Ecumenism, after all, is not like the stock market; one does not get a reading on it simply by pressing a button. Much of the real work that is being done often fails to make the headlines, and besides, ideas have a peculiar habit of making their impact in a subterranean or circuitous manner. The contemporary observer is therefore not in the best position to distinguish between permanent trends and momentary fluctuations. Nor should we forget that ecumenism as we understand it today is still in its infancy. Looking back, we cannot help noticing that the child has grown prodigiously in a remarkably short span of time. Barely fifteen years ago, most Christians had never seen the word "ecumenism" and a majority of those who had did not know how to pronounce it.[5] Now, 80% of the Roman Catholic population has heard of the ecumenical movement and some 15% of it has been actively involved in it in one way or another. The first ecumenical commission to be established in a Roman Catholic diocese in this country—which, if I am not mistaken, was that of Baltimore—dates only from 1962. Today, over a hundred out of the one hundred and sixty-two dioceses have commissions of their own.

The hope that the Roman Catholic Church might become a full-fledged member of the World Council of Churches has not been fulfilled, but important continuing relationships have been maintained and strengthened through staff cooperation in many areas. Most denominations have likewise created new departments of ecumenical and interreligious affairs and have assiduously sought to expunge from their official texts all vestiges of the old polemics. The past two years or so have seen the publication of a *Common Bible* and now of a *Common Catechism,* which even in outward appearance was made to resemble the *New Catechism,* published by Roman Catholic theologians in 1967. Similarly, a close examination of the recently completed, though not yet approved, revision of the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* would, I suspect, reveal a conscious effort to achieve a degree of uniformity with the liturgical texts in use in the Roman Catholic Church.

Two further developments deserve special mention because of the publicity that they have attracted in recent months. The first is the work of the national and international bilateral consultations which have

been in existence since the middle sixties and which have begun to produce a series of consensus statements on points of vital interest such as baptism, the Eucharist, the papal office, holy orders, and (this one not yet off the press but soon to see the light of day) the spirituality of the ministry. The second development has to do with ecumenical collaboration on the level of the parish and the local church. One particularly promising experiment along these lines has been the covenanting of neighboring parishes in a given geographical area, especially between Roman Catholics and Anglicans, and, to a lesser extent, Roman Catholics and Lutherans. The latest initiative of this kind is less than two weeks old and took place in Boston exactly twelve days ago. A variation of the same formula is the covenanting of two dioceses in Georgia, according to another recent announcement.

The concrete form taken by these covenants tends to vary from place to place but usually includes such things as pulpit exchanges, the sharing of common facilities, and involvement in a variety of social and educational projects. Their unique significance lies in the fact that they involve the participation of Christian laymen and laywomen in the ecumenical process at the grass-roots level. Experience has taught us that unless the positions hammered out by theologians filter down to a wider audience, the chances of eventual reunion will be greatly diminished. The failure of the Council of Florence, which reconciled Rome and Constantinople in the thirteenth century, is largely attributable to the lack of preparation on the part of the Christian laity for such a move.

The few reports that have become available indicate that local covenants succeed where there is strong leadership and support from pastors and ministers. Here, as elsewhere, there are obstacles to be overcome, one of which is that in some localities the covenanting parishes tend to be very different in size. In the Boston diocese, Roman Catholics number roughly two million, whereas Anglicans stand at approximately 75,000. The initial fear caused by this numerical disproportion has not proved decisive, however, and the success encountered in one area has served as a spur to undertake similar experiments in others.

This, in brief, is the encouraging word; but perhaps it, too, needs to be qualified, for not everybody views these developments with the same measure of optimism. Depending on one's point of view, one may be more impressed by the mountainous laboring than by the small mouse that it has thus far produced. True, the various churches have begun to work together more closely than they had in the past; but cooperation of this kind has existed before without bringing the cooperating churches any nearer to the ultimate goal of corporate unity. The revisers of the *Book of Common Prayer* can surely be applauded for their efforts to harmonize their language with that of other liturgical texts, although it might have been to their advantage to avoid some of the egregious blunders, not to say patent absurdities, of their Roman Catholic counterparts. One wonders, for example, how much is gained by replacing the "I believe" of the Nicene Creed with the now fashionable "We believe," in accordance with the latest sociological craze, or by referring to God as the "Maker of all things seen and unseen," instead of the "Maker of all things visible and invisible." You may not see me for a week, but that does not make me invisible. Something of the cosmic dimension of the liturgy is lost here. Similar remarks apply to the *Common Catechism* which, its "common denominator" approach to the teachings of the faith, has left itself open to the charge of being nothing more than a "manual of intellectual civility among theologians." There may be an element of unpleasant truth in the allegation that modern ecumenism has accepted its failure to provide anything but a warm feeling, that it is best described as a "gentlemanly" retreat from mutually unacceptable positions, and, to quote a recent critic, that it represents a kind of "mental moratorium" in which academics and ecclesiasts are prone to dally while the faith of believers leaves them far behind.

These reservations notwithstanding, one could still argue that the ecumenical movement has already achieved a remarkable degree of success. Let us grant for the sake of argument that ecumenism has not done much more than acquaint the churches with one another and improve relations among them. By so doing, it has made it impossible for them to define themselves in opposition to one another, as was their wont in the past, and has compelled them to raise in a positive way the question of their respective identities. This, I submit, is the most fundamental question that we have to face. Our problem is not so much that we do not know one another but that we do not know ourselves. As long as we had declared enemies, we could feel reasonably secure. We at least knew who we were and were spared the agony of having to understand ourselves in our own terms. Now that the old enmities have begun to fade, even that convenient prop has been removed from under us. As a result, all churches are undergoing an identity crisis that is unparalleled in the history of Christianity. The crisis need not be fatal. It could be a crisis of opportunity, signaling not the demise but the recovery of the ecumenical movement in the years ahead. But if we are going to survive the crisis, something more than what has been done so far will be needed. What else is needed to make ecumenism work?

ECUMENISM AS UNITY

With this in mind, let me turn to what are generally regarded as the two basic dimensions of ecumenism, namely, ecumenism as unity and ecumenism as mission. First, ecumenism as unity.

We can take it for granted that any attempt at dialogue among Christians presupposes a genuine commitment to one's own tradition, and that such a commitment is not a hindrance but a necessary requirement of any profound encounter with persons of another religious persuasion. Ecumenism, properly understood, was never intended as a subtle betrayal of one's position. It is basically loyal and it looks for the same kind of loyalty in others. It thus implies a painful tension between the desire for unity on the one hand and faithfulness to one's heritage on the other. It can be sympathetic and open to other positions, not because it is ready to accept everything, but because it is motivated by an awareness of the intrinsic limits of human sympathy. Universal sympathy is not an ideal that we can or should strive for. One can even say that it is self-contradictory in so far as it demands that one bracket one's attachment to his faith and provisionally espouse another's attachment as his own. Such a posture will never be more than a pretense. At best, it leads to a histrionic rather than a serious identification with the other and hence misses what is most important in him, the depth of his total commitment. I can fully understand another person's commitment only to the extent to which I myself have personally experienced a similar commitment. Any suspension of belief, however provisional, necessarily destroys that commitment and entails a subtle demotion or an implicit disrespect of all religious positions. It reveals an attitude that is more superficial than profound, more arrogant than humble, and more provincial than truly universal. But if a commitment is essential, and if each one of us must remain committed to his own tradition, how is reconciliation possible? How will we ever become one? That is the first question or the first way of seeing the problem.

Second, we can also take it for granted that the unity we seek will not be achieved, as it presumably was in the past, on the basis of a rigid adherence to a set of dogmatic formulas. The word most often used nowadays to describe this situation is "pluralism," a term which was virtually unknown at least in Roman Catholic circles until a few years ago but which has gained widespread currency even in official or semi-official documents. Like it or not, pluralism is here to stay. The problem is not whether we can accept it, but how we are to understand it. The matter has been well stated by a Belgian ecumenist, Père Lanne, who writes: "It is the faith which is one, while its expressions are plural. This plurality does not need to be legitimized. It is a fact that flows from the very necessity of the Christian faith in the different cultures. No theological systematization can be exhaustive and no philosophical system can claim to commit the Church."[6] Père Lanne's remarks would appear to be based on sound empirical evidence and recommend themselves to us by their generous openness to the diversity of forms that the Christian faith has taken in the past or may be expected to take as time goes on. The more one analyzes them, however, the more it strikes us that they are not so much a solution to the problem as a restatement of it. The difficulty to which they give rise concerns the "one faith" which underlies the various forms that Christianity is said to have assumed in the course of the centuries.

Our contemporaries are justifiably suspicious of any attempt to absolutize any concrete expression of the Christian faith or any particular moment in the history of Christianity. Yet to say that these various expressions are all expressions of the Christian faith is to imply that they have something in common and, moreover, that we have a prior understanding of what it is that they have in common. For otherwise it would be utterly impossible to discriminate between a legitimate expression of the Christian faith and one that only claims to be legitimate. Even if we assume, as I think we must, that no formula and no systematization is capable of exhausting the Christian mystery, some norm or principle is needed in the light of which every attempt to formulate or interpret this mystery is seen as contingent and, to that extent, relativized. But one cannot relativize everything. To speak of something as relative is to refer at least implicitly to some absolute on the basis of which the relative is perceived as relative. It is likewise true that the substance of the faith must be reformulated in terms that speak to people of widely different cultural backgrounds. Such reformulations, however, are always judged to be acceptable or unacceptable by reason of their conformity or lack of conformity with a known rule of faith. Just as I cannot recognize a distortion as a distortion unless I perceive it as a departure from some norm, so I cannot reasonably accept or reject a given formulation except by reference to some pre-existing standard to which it either does or does not measure up. One possible solution would be to look for some intrinsic norm or authenticating power, such as the consensus of theologians or of the faithful.[7] There is, to be sure, some warrant for this suggestion in the Christian tradition; but it is doubtful whether mere consensus was ever regarded as being by itself a sufficient criterium of belief. It is equally doubtful whether any such consensus ever existed in the past, and certainly none seems to be in the making at the present moment. It is one of the characteristics of our time, and perhaps one of the clearest symptoms of our malaise, that no one today speaks with anything like an

authoritative voice.

The question, then, remains: what is the status of this elusive "x" which is refracted in, adapted to, or reformulated for the benefit of different times and different peoples? As something mysterious and hence never apprehended in its totality, the faith transcends all specific formulations that it has received in the past or is susceptible of receiving in the future. But unless we have some intimation of its content, we shall be at a loss to say anything determinate about it. The mystery runs the risk of degenerating into a kind of mystification which any serious-minded person is entitled to dismiss out of hand and which, in the worst instance, lends itself to the naïve [aspirations[8]] of enthusiasts or the callous manipulations of unscrupulous persons only too eager to exploit religion for purposes that are anything but religious.

To repeat the basic issue: the problem that we face is twofold—how does one reconcile commitment to one's own faith with the pluriformity imposed upon us by the accidents of history, and, secondly, how does one reconcile doctrinal pluralism or pluriformity with the self-proclaimed oneness of the Christian faith? Both questions are obviously closely related and call for a common answer. We hardly need to remind ourselves that there is no simple answer to either one. At this stage of the discussion, the problem may be clearer than any solution that anyone is in a position to offer. What is certain, however, is that if no attempt is made, we shall never arrive at an adequate solution.

I would suggest that the natural starting-point of any real dialogue between churches is provided by the respective traditions to which each of the participants engaged as equal partners in the dialogue belong. None of us is a presuppositionless angel. We are all products of a specific tradition, which colors our outlook and determines, if not the outcome of the discussion, at least the form that it will take in the first instance. There is no Archimedean point outside the system, so to speak, from which to view the system and its different parts as a whole. Any position of neutrality is ruled out because it is incompatible with the faith and because it is unlikely to be genuinely neutral. One may be indifferent to one's tradition, or become disenchanted with it, or even repudiate it, but even in this extreme case he remains dependent upon it. I personally doubt whether a truly independent stance can be achieved except in the rarest of cases. Be that as it may, the truth of the matter is that we do not have access to the faith save by means of the tradition through which it has come down to us. If we did, the problem would be solved and we could all go home. What we see clearly at any given moment is not the faith in its aboriginal fullness but a particularized and hence constricted version of it. This is true of the paradigmatic moment of the apostolic witness, since here too, an effort was made to articulate a fundamental experience in such a way as to render it communicable to others.

To say this, however, is to acknowledge at the same time that the faith is not immediately available to us in its purest form. One can accept this fact without prejudice to the loyalty that one owes to one's tradition. A person who cherishes his tradition is not only eager to preserve it but to develop and improve it. A great tradition is necessarily a living tradition. It is capable of being enriched by successive generations and it also needs to be purged constantly of undesirable excrescences or of once desirable but no longer useful accretions.

This is precisely the point on which both sides erred at the time of the Reformation, albeit in different ways. To speak in broadest terms, the Roman Church tended to view itself as the repository of a faith that had been kept intact since the beginning. It failed to see that time is a vector of evil as well as of good and was blind to the distortions and obfuscations accruing to it from the conditions of its existence in a unique historical configuration. The Reformers, on the other hand, were equally deluded in thinking that they could annihilate centuries of Christian existence and effect a simple return to the faith of the primitive church. What they rediscovered was not the primitive Christian order but an artificial reconstruction of it visibly conditioned by the circumstances of their own sixteenth-century existence.

Assuming that there is something to be said for this view, modern-day ecumenism, if it is to succeed, will have to take the form not of an abandonment of one's tradition but of an ascent from its present and to a large extent inherited understanding of it to what, we hope, will be a deeper, purer, and more adequate understanding. The advantage of such an approach is that it safeguards the element of continuity between one's starting-point and the longed-for goal of unity. Instead of imposing on us the necessity of looking away from our tradition, it invites us to look in the same direction but with the expectation of eventually being able to see beyond our present limited horizon. It supplies the guidance that would otherwise be lacking and, in this manner, it could help us to recapture a sense of the unity of the faith beneath the plurality of its historical forms.

Viewed in this light, even the dogmatic definitions and credal statements by means of which the churches

have sought to identify themselves in the past could serve as stepping-stones toward this larger unity. Our task, as we have come to understand it, is not so much to justify or criticize the old formulas, but to rediscover beneath the sedimentations of history and the traditions of the schools the original experiences imbedded in and partially concealed by them.

We have as yet no distinct perception of the form that the new unity, if it ever comes, will take. As has often been observed, there is something serendipitous about the ecumenical movement which makes of it a venture in the true sense of the word. We embark upon that venture without any clear foreknowledge of where it will lead us and no guarantee that we will be the same when we reach our destination. But the transformation in store for us need not be apprehended since there is sufficient assurance that none of the elements perceived as essential to our faith will have been sacrificed in the process.

ECUMENISM AS MISSION

I shall say only a few words about the second facet of ecumenism or ecumenism as mission, not because it is less deserving of attention—if anything, it is rapidly becoming the major concern of all Christian churches—but because it would be impossible to do justice to it in the little time that we have left. In the carefully worded statement to which we have already referred, Archbishop Bernardin writes:

> As Vatican II insisted, the churches must combine their incomparable resources in a massive effort to make society and man more human. It is in the area of human development, of human liberation from social sin that the churches can and must speak with one voice, bear one witness. Let all Christian communities proclaim this one message: We will join together in committing our spiritual and material resources in an unprecedented effort to lift from human persons all over the globe the yokes of oppression—social, political, economic—that grind them into an inhuman dust. This is ecumenism in the seventies: the fashioning of an *oikoumene,* one world of justice and peace.

Words such as these are likely to strike a responsive chord in the hearts of most people today and reflect a trend that has gained enormous strength among all Christian denominations for the past decade. The liveliest discussions to which they have given rise in recent years have focused on the question of whether or not economic issues, political problems, and social progress have been over-emphasized to the neglect of God's saving word for mankind. Reserves over this matter have been expressed by prominent churchmen, both at the meeting of the World Council's Central Committee in August 1973, and at the Synod of Bishops in Rome last year. Some theologians are likewise concerned that Liberation Theology, especially that of Latin American provenance, is a mere theological cloak and justification for ideological goals and revolutionary strategies.

Implicit in this whole debate is the more fundamental question of the nature of the church and its relation to civil society. There is a general recognition that the church should not involve itself in partisan politics or be motivated by ideological principles. How and where one draws the line between the concern for justice and political aspirations, however, is not always clear. What is most sorely needed is a political theology that is adequate to the needs of the hour. That political theology, as far as I can see, is virtually non-existent.

CONCLUSION

Allow me to end after the manner of the old theology manuals with two practical corollaries that have very much to do with what I have said this morning. The first is that, in the interest of better relations, to say nothing of plain Christian charity, ecumenists might try to develop a greater sense of humor. In his *Life of Johnson,* Boswell speaks of a person who had decided to study for the ministry but was soon forced to abandon the project because cheerfulness kept breaking in. I am not familiar with all of the literature on ecumenism, but the part of it that I have read is not exactly notable for its sprightliness. In any event, I doubt whether the movement would suffer very much—it might even make a few more adepts—if the law of ecumenical gravity were infringed with greater freedom.

I remember being present some time ago at a lecture given by Professor Henry Chadwick of Oxford on the origin of the term, "ecumenical council." Contrary to what might have been expected, the expression is not a Christian invention. Even Nicea, the first ecumenical Council, was not labeled "ecumenical" until some years later. It became ecumenical only retroactively, so to speak. The word was first used by

confraternities of Dionysiac actors who gathered once a year for what they called an "ecumenical council." Chadwick's own conclusion was that the present-day ecumenical movement could stand an infusion of Dionysiac spirit. Religion is, of course, a grave matter, and I am not suggesting that we should make light of it. But precisely because of its seriousness, it tends to breed a form of self-deception for which a touch of purifying wit may in the end be one of the best antidotes.

My second corollary touches upon a matter to which too little attention has been devoted for too long, and that is the need to supplement the "horizontal pluralism" to which the ecumenical movement has accustomed us with what might be described as a "vertical pluralism." Public statements made by theologians often fail to take into account the widely divergent situations in which their listeners find themselves. Not everyone has reached the same understanding of these problems or is capable of dealing with them on the same level. What is lacking for the most part is a technique of communication which would enable us to speak at one and the same time to specifically different audiences without alienating anyone or adding to the present confusion, which is already greater than most people can bear. Such techniques existed in the past but have long since disappeared from our midst.[9]

It is one of the nice things about our time that no one today looks for a magic solution to any of our problems. Surely no one will take my remarks as offering any kind of magic solution, and you may even be tempted to exclaim with the Chorus to Cassandra in the Agamemnon: "We need no prophet to tell us this!" The purpose [of my remarks] was much more modest, and what happens next is really up to us. I was amused by a quote from The Economist in the Magazine section of the *New York Times* last Sunday: "Don't just sit there, build an ark."[10] The advice might apply to all of us.[11]

NOTES

1 Editor's Note: "The Ecumenical Venture" was presented in the summer of 1975. I have not been able to ascertain the occasion at which it was presented.

2 The 1974 Synod of Bishops, held in October of that year.

3 George Dugan, idem., *New York Times,* 11 May 1975, 35.

4 David J. Bowman, S.J., U.S. *Catholic Ecumenism—Ten Years Later* (Washington, D.C., United States Catholic Conference, 1975).

5 See supra, 211. To avoid redundancy with the above, the following sentence has been omitted: "Was it ecumenism, or ecumenism, or ecumenism? Or should one not rather say "ecumenicism"? I once heard a distinguished foreigner solve the problem very neatly by pronouncing it 'You-come-in-ism.'"

6 "Unite de la foi et pluralisme theologique," *Irénikon* 46 (2^{e} Trimestre 1973), 209.

7 Cf. James Hitchcock, "Thomas More and the 'Sensus fidelium,'" *Theological Studies* 36:1 (March 1975), 145-54.

8 Editor's Note: The original word is illegible.

9 Cf. supra, 13-29, 52-56.

10 James Reston, "How to Beat the Inflation," *New York Times,* 28 August 1974, 31.

11 Editor's Note: Fortin also appended the following—"If it will make our discussion any easier, let me repeat in the form of a series of questions the points that I have tried to make: 1) Does ecumenism require, and should it strive for, unity of belief? 2) Assuming that it does, what is meant by doctrinal or religious pluralism? 3) Assuming that social action is an integral part of the ecumenical outlook, what form should it take and what stance should the churches adopt in regard to the problems of civil society in our time?"

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HOLINESS OF THE CHURCH AND MINISTERIAL HOLINESS

It is characteristic of our time that holiness, the oldest mark of the Church, is also the one that we find most difficult to understand.[1] The same is undoubtedly true of the notion of ministerial holiness, which, despite its importance in both the Methodist and the Roman Catholic traditions, has lost much of the clarity that it apparently once had in the minds of our predecessors. As in so many other cases, we thus face the urgent and common task of recasting the problem in terms that are more readily accessible to our contemporaries. In accordance with our stated purpose, I shall address myself principally to the question of holiness as it relates to the ministry. But since ministerial holiness is intimately bound up with the holiness of the Church and unintelligible apart from it, some preliminary remarks concerning the holiness of the Church in general would seem to be in order. For the sake of clarity, I shall try to state the issue as simply as possible, limiting myself to those aspects of the problem which are more germane to our discussions. It may be, as Peter Berger has suggested, that a certain kind of simplification, hopefully not based on ignorance, is long overdue in the business of theologizing.

THE HOLINESS OF THE CHURCH

Scholars are generally agreed that the connotation of the word "holy" has nothing to do, at least in the first instance, with personal holiness or *de facto* moral perfection. The Church is holy because it has been chosen by God, because God dwells in it in the Person of the Holy Spirit, and because He has predestined it to a glorious inheritance. As it applies to the Church, therefore, holiness is directly related to the holiness of God Himself. The link between the two is expressly established in the earliest Christian creeds, in which belief in the Holy Catholic Church follows immediately the article referring to the Holy Spirit.[2] The Church derives its holiness from the fact that it is called into being by a Holy God, whose Spirit is continuously at work in it and daily summons its members to a new and higher existence. As the First Letter of Peter puts it, summing up and applying to the new people of God the attributes of the Old Israel: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people He claims for His own to proclaim the glorious works of the One who called you from darkness into His marvelous light."[3]

The meaning of these observations will become somewhat clearer if we reflect for a moment on the biblical concept of divine holiness. It is customary in current theological literature to interpret God's holiness in terms of His hiddenness, His transcendence, His incommensurability to all forms of human existence. God is the "wholly other," whom one does not dare approach or whom one approaches only with fear and trembling. He is the God whom no one has ever seen face to face, the mysterious God who at once fascinates and terrifies, attracts and repels. At the same time, and paradoxically, this God of majesty and power is also a God of infinite love, who draws near to His people, intervenes on its behalf, and is actively involved in its affairs.

However valid that description may be, it nevertheless has its shortcomings. The attempt to deal with the problem of religion through the a *priori* category of the "numinous," on which it ostensibly rests, was originally devised as a means of accrediting religion in what seemed to have become by the end of the nineteenth century an essentially desacralized, denumenized, and disenchanted world. It emerged as part of a general effort undertaken by contemporary theologians to lay the foundations for a new *Religionswissenschaft* on the basis of which the religious phenomenon could once again command the attention and respect of its cultured despisers. Without questioning the usefulness of such an approach, one may wonder in retrospect whether it does full justice to the teaching of the Bible. While it brings to light a number of elements that appear to be common to the religious experience of mankind, it fails to take account of the most distinctive feature of the biblical narrative, namely, the very notion of a holy God. It is significant that the idea of a holy God is alien to the classical world in the midst of which Christianity developed. For pagan antiquity, the term "holy" applies to objects, but rarely if ever to persons and even

less to peoples or nations. Objects were regarded as holy to the extent to which they were reserved or set apart for the service of the god or gods. To profane an object thus consecrated constituted a special crime calling for special punishments. The gods themselves were not holy. They were certainly not considered holy by the early Christian writers, and, interestingly enough, are generally not referred to as such in classical literature. Only in the Bible does one find any real emphasis on or forceful proclamation of divine holiness.

The biblical concept of holiness habitually goes hand in hand with the notion of divine justice. To say that God is holy is to suggest, among other things, that He is always perfectly just in His dealings with men, however mysterious His ways may appear to be at times. "The Lord God, the Holy One of Israel... is a God of justice," in whose presence man, the sinful creature, can only experience his own unworthiness.[4] What is more, God's holiness is the norm and reason for man's holiness. As a nation called into being by God and claimed by Him as peculiarly His own, Israel at once shares in the holiness of God and is invited to become holy after His own likeness: "You shall make and keep yourselves holy, because I am holy."[5] The same notion was subsequently taken over by the New Testament writers to describe the new people whom God has chosen in Christ before the world began "to be holy and blameless in His sight and full of love."[6] To the (ontological) holiness predicated of the Church by reason of its election as the New Israel corresponds a moral ideal which finds its classic expression in the Sermon on the Mount, which is best exemplified by Christ, and to which all Christians, as members of Christ's body, are urged to conform their lives. It should be noted that, on this level at least, the moral holiness in question is separable from the particular conception of sanctifying grace, based on Aristotelian psychology, in terms of which it was interpreted in scholastic theology. It refers primarily, not to the degree of internal holiness that one may have achieved or that one may be tempted to claim for oneself, but to the Christ-like way of life for which one strives or from which one occasionally departs. Indeed, the person who, because of his good deeds, thinks himself personally holier than his neighbor indicates by that very fact that he is still far from the goal to which he presumably aspires. The question, then, is not whether the Christian who shares God's own life should seek holiness, but whether and to what extent such holiness is possible in this life.

The answer to that question, as we all know, is not as simple as might seem at first glance. It does not suffice to say that, because of his innate selfishness and habitual proneness to evil, man finds it difficult to act at all times in accordance with the demands of Christian love. There are other reasons which make it impossible even for the perfectly just man, if he were ever to exist, to live up to the ideal of holiness as set forth in the Gospel. As a human being and a citizen, the Christian is compelled within certain broad limits to order his life according to the norms of the society to which he belongs. If, as may be argued, all civil societies are necessarily imperfect, if each one is to a greater or lesser degree a compact of wickedness,[7] the Christian who loves his country and considers it his religious duty to do so becomes *eo facto* a party to its injustice. One cannot function as a law-abiding citizen of a particular society, hold public office in it, or share its general way of life without being implicated in its inequities and actively contributing to them. It may be objected that one is always free to offer passive resistance to the manifestly unjust laws of one's country; but even this will not work, since by his mere presence in that society and his compliance with its so-called just laws, he involuntarily lends his support to it. The point, which has often been made in our time, is dramatized with particular vividness in a recent play entitled *The Kitchen,* in which the employees of a restaurant conspire to destroy their establishment, not because they dislike the owner—an admirable man whom they love as a friend and respect for his integrity—but for the simple reason that the business he operates is part of a corrupt order which they feel can no longer be tolerated.[8]

The problem, needless to say, is not restricted to our time. It comes up in a less radical way in Luther's discussion of the hangman, who performs a necessary but unpleasant duty and, without any malice on his part, runs the constant risk of putting innocent men to death. (In saying this I am not necessarily advocating a return to Luther's "two kingdoms" theory, although there may be more to be said for that theory than is generally admitted today, but only using that theory to illustrate the dilemma with which Christianity has always had to contend in one form or another.) The very same problem is adumbrated in I Corinthians 6:1ff., where St. Paul suggests that the simple fact that Christians have lawsuits against one another is disastrous for them, and that they would be better off to put up with injustice and allow themselves to be cheated. While there is surely nothing to prevent a Christian from aiming at the superior form of justice hinted at in Paul's statement, it is unlikely that society as a whole could ever function effectively on the basis of such a principle. As one of the most famous statesmen of our century has expressed it, "The Sermon on the Mount is the last word in Christian ethics... Still, it is not on these terms that Ministers assume their responsibilities of guiding states."[9] More crudely stated, one cannot consistently fulfill one's duties as a citizen without breaking the Ten Commandments, not to speak of the dictates of the Sermon on the Mount.

This amounts to saying that the ideal of moral perfection presented in the New Testament is not susceptible of being implemented *in toto* in civil society. In light of this fact, it makes little sense to defend the holiness of the Church by distinguishing between its holy and sinful parts, or, for that matter, between a holy Church and its sinful members—as if it were possible for any of its parts to be sinless, or as if a body could be declared holy when it is made up entirely of sinful members. The Church is holy in that it participates in the divine life and to the extent to which, in their dealings with one another and with other men, its members are guided by the loftier ideal of the Sermon on the Mount; but the full realization of that ideal is clearly reserved for a future state in which God will be all in all.

MINISTERIAL HOLINESS

What has been said about the holiness of the Church applies in a special way to the ordained minister, not because he is himself holier or necessarily called to a higher degree of personal holiness than those to whom he ministers—for all Christians are called to the fullness of the Christian life and the perfection of charity—but because of the unique position that he occupies within the Church. Both the Methodist and the Roman Catholic traditions distinguish between the general or "prophetic" ministry of laymen and the ordained ministry. By reason of his calling and the peculiar nature of his office, the ordained minister enjoys what sociologists call "high visibility" among his fellow men and is presumed to embody in some distinctive fashion the way of life of the group whom he serves. The *Book of Discipline* of the United Methodist Church specifies that aspirants to the ordained ministry are expected to be "holy in all manner of conversation."[10] One cannot effectively preach the Word of God, bear public testimony to the faith of the Church, and, above all, preside over the eucharistic celebration, which expresses in its most concentrated form the whole life of the people of God, if his commitments to the Gospel is belied by his own personal behavior. To quote once more from the *Book of Discipline*, "Only persons of genuine Christian experience and character who are free from harmful practices that would mar their influence or compromise their witness can receive the approval of the United Methodist Church as ministers of the Word, Sacrament, and Order."[11]

It goes without saying that one's criteria of judgment in these matters will be affected by the relativities inherent in the human situation. The norms of practical morals do not all share in the immutability of their ultimate source. There was a time when in certain countries poaching was a crime punishable by death because it threatened the whole social and political order. Traces of a similar relativity are encountered in the medieval penitentials, where the gravity of specific offenses against Christian morals or discipline fluctuates to a considerable degree with the changing circumstances of the times. The varying fortunes of the old notion of capital sin undoubtedly have much to tell us about the kinds of problems with which our forebears were confronted at other moments in history. If such is the case, one would normally expect a shift in emphasis corresponding to the needs of our own day. That shift is perhaps most clearly discernible in the newly found concern for social justice and public morality. At a time when the possibility of social reform was hardly more than a dim prospect, or was probably not perceived at all by most people, attention inevitably tended to focus on more immediate questions of individual morality and conduct. Such exclusive preoccupations are bound to seem hollow or hypocritical today if unaccompanied by an equally sharp sensitivity to the broad problems of justice as they have come to the fore in an acquisitive society which distributes income with little regard to the use that is to be made of it or to the widening gulf that continues to separate the rich from the poor. In this respect the notion of trusteeship as regards material goods, which the *Book of Discipline* appropriately stresses, goes to the heart of the matter more directly than some of the narrower issues that have traditionally absorbed the bulk of our energies. If it is true that the Gospel exhibits a particular concern for the poor and the afflicted, the Church at large, which has been established to continue the work of Christ, cannot remain indifferent to their plight. By the same token, the minister whose whole lifestyle betrays a flagrant disregard for the ideal of evangelical poverty can hardly hope to discharge his functions with any measure of credibility. In short, a certain simplicity of life or *haplotês* in the Pauline sense is indispensable to the witness that the minister is called upon to give in his capacity as an officially designated representative of the Christian community.

Closely allied to the social dimension of the concept of ministerial holiness is the equally crucial issue of authority in the Church. The precise question to be raised in this regard does not concern the principle of authority, which is plainly enunciated in the New Testament and recognized by Methodists and Roman Catholics alike. Nor does it have to do primarily with the form which that authority has taken historically in the various Christian communities. This is not to deny that recent trends in the direction of a greater democratization of the Roman Catholic Church—as evidenced by Vatican II's doctrine of collegiality and shared responsibility or its return to the basic concept of the Church as a people to whom God communicates Himself in love—may have far-reaching ecumenical implications, but only that they are less

relevant to the question at hand. There is, however, another aspect of current Roman Catholic ecclesiology which may be thought to bear more directly on the issue, and that is the new insistence on the essentially diaconic nature of authority. The definition of authority in terms of service rather than of power or privilege did not, of course, originate with Christianity and is not by any means proper to it. To my knowledge, authority has never been defined otherwise, except in certain typically modern political philosophies. The point is rather that, while in principle all rule is for the sake of the common good, rulers are motivated for the most part by interests that have in fact very little to do with the general welfare, whatever lip service they may feel constrained to pay to it. One need not be a cynic to recognize that all or most societies are organized for the benefit of those who run them. The specific claim of Christianity is not that it has revealed to the world the selfless love implied in the notion of a just rule but that, through the power of Christ, it liberates man for the actual exercise of that love.

Although the remarks of Vatican II on this subject are addressed in the main to bishops,[12] it is clear that they are meant for all ministers to the extent to which they are associated with their bishops in the government of the Church, taking upon themselves, as far as they are able to, the same duties and concerns and making the universal Church visible in their own communities.[13] As shepherds of God's flock, they, too, are responsible for carrying out their ministry with holiness, eagerness, humility, and courage, after the example of Christ, who came not to be ministered unto but to minister [14] and to lay down His life for His sheep.[15]

The only other dimension of ministerial holiness on which I shall dwell briefly concerns the ministry of the Word and is ultimately rooted in the fact that Christianity presents itself first and foremost as a faith or a sacred doctrine rather than as a divine law. The difficulties inherent in the preaching and teaching of the Gospel message arise on many levels and take on many different forms. There is, to begin with, the permanent danger, against which St. Paul repeatedly warns, of falsifying and newfangling the Word of God. And there is the further problem of expressing that Word in "dialogue with the modern world," as Vatican II suggests,[16] or in terms that speak to the situation of modern man. It would be hard to overestimate the magnitude of the task created for the Christian preacher by the breakdown of sociological Christendom, the confrontation in which for the last century and a half Christian theology has been engaged on a wide variety of fronts with secular thought, and the general crisis which the Christian churches are experiencing at the present moment. One is sometimes tempted to think that that crisis is not so much an internal crisis as a broad cultural crisis encompassing every phase of human life and thought. But, even if such were the case, one would still have to explain why the crisis has been felt so keenly within the Christian fold or why Christian theology has proved so vulnerable in the face of it.

Over and beyond this much debated issue, however, lies the distrust or the negative response that the Christian doctrine of holiness often evokes on the part of non-Christians. It is unfortunate but true that "holiness" has become synonymous with "intransigence" in the minds of many of our more thoughtful contemporaries. No one can deny that historically, and virtually without any exception, the Christian churches have succumbed to a peculiar brand of fanaticism that is all the more dangerous as it develops under the banner of moral goodness and virtue. This, I submit, is the real threat to Christianity from within. There is a sense in which it is accurate to say that virtue is more harmful than vice and belief more harmful than unbelief. Christianity teaches an applicable morality, but without lowering the standards of morality. Thus it is almost inevitable that its behavior should be interpreted by its detractors as a prime example of the inhumanity fostered by the undue exaltation of the principles of human conduct. To the "pious cruelty" (Machiavelli's comment about the *reyes cristianos*[17]) for which in time it became notorious may be traced in large part to the disrepute into which it has fallen during the modern period. It is doubtful whether any of the measures employed to restore its lost credit will have much effect if one does not succeed in introducing into the preaching of the Gospel that element of humaneness which, rightly or wrongly, has so often been seen to be lacking in it.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing remarks are obviously sketchy and incomplete, but, I hope, not altogether misleading. My intention has been to search out, within the context of the Christian life, some elements that might provide a starting-point for a common understanding of the spirituality of the ministry. Accordingly, I have deliberately avoided any reference to the technical formulations (sanctifying grace, sacramental grace, sacramental character, etc.) by means of which our predecessors sought to express their insights into the basic issues. The task of theology, as we have come to perceive in, is not merely and perhaps not primarily to justify or criticize the formulas of the past, but to recapture, beneath the sedimentations of history and the tradition of the schools, the original experiences imbedded, in and partially concealed by, them. While

such an endeavor may never be sufficient by itself, it could conceivably serve as a useful preparation for, or complement to, the thematic discussion of established and time-hallowed positions.

One is reminded in this connection of a passage in *Gulliver's Travels* in which Gulliver lays out before the king of Brobdignag the complex story of the political and religious schisms of his native land, whereupon the king picks him up in his right hand, strokes him gently on the head with the other, and, after a hearty fit of laughter, asks him to which party he belongs.[18] It is not necessary to share Dean Swift's impiety in order to realize that the predicament in which our divided Christianity finds itself is unlikely to be improved unless we can make clear to ourselves and to others the ground of our dissensions, let alone overcome them.

NOTES

1 Editor's Note: "Holiness of the Church and Ministerial Holiness" was presented in March 1973 as part of a United Methodist-Roman Catholic Dialogue sponsored by the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs.

2 Cf. Hippolytus of Rome, *Traditio Apostolica*: "I believe in the Holy Spirit (who is) within the Holy Church for the resurrection of the flesh."

3 I Pet. 2:9; cf. Is. 44:1; Ex. 19:6; Mal. 3:17; Hos. 1:9; 2:25.

4 Is. 30:15,13; 5:16; 6:3; cf. Ps. 145:17; Rev. 16:5.

5 Lev. 11:44; cf. 19:2; 20:26; Deut. 7:6, etc.

6 Eph. 1:4; cf. I Pet. 1:15-16.

7 Cf. *De civitate Dei* XIX.24.

8 Editor's Note: Most likely Arnold Wesker's *The Kitchen: A Play in Two Parts, with an Interlude* (London: Cape, 1961/New York: Random House, 1962).

9 Editor's Note: Winston Churchill.

10 Nashville, Tennessee: Methodist Publishing House, 1968, 305, no. 305,1.

11 Ibid., 306, no. 306.

12 Cf. *Lumen Gentium,* 27.

13 Cf. ibid., 28.

14 Cf. Mt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45.

15 Cf. *In.* 10:11.

16 *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests (Presbyterorum ordinis),* 12.

17 *The Prince,* chap. 21.

18 Part II, chap. 3.

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CHRISTIAN MISSION AND SPIRITUALITY: ROMAN CATHOLICS AND METHODISTS IN DIALOGUE

In January 1976, ten years to the month after its inception, the Roman Catholic-United Methodist national bilateral consultation issued its first consensus statement.[1] Although the document is not likely to go down as a landmark in ecumenical history—so far it has hardly elicited any publicity at all—it nevertheless merits serious consideration. Its significance lies in the fact that it is the only statement of its kind to deal *ex professo* with what must be regarded as one of the chief aims of the entire ecumenical movement, the revitalization of Christian spirituality in our day. Our churches would have little cause to rejoice if in their common efforts to promote Christian unity they were to lose sight of the one element that makes the goal of reunion so desirable in the first place.

THE DIALOGUE IN CONTEXT

A first series of encounters between Methodists and Roman Catholics, which lasted until 1969, had delved into such matters as the nature of faith, the problems of Christian education, and the controverted issue of public aid to church-affiliated private schools. The results were far from negligible but the wide range of subjects covered, none of which could be probed with any degree of thoroughness, ruled out the possibility of bringing these results to the notice of the larger community. Accordingly, when in the spring of 1972 the dialogue was reconstituted for a second round of meetings, it was agreed that the discussion should bear on a single, reasonably well-defined topic, namely, the spirituality of the ministry.

The relevance of that topic will be more fully appreciated if one reflects not only on the spiritual impoverishment of modern life but on the unique situation of the Christian churches in our country. The United States, as we all know, is the first nation to have secularized its political life or, in more common parlance, to have institutionalized the separation of Church and state. From the beginning it showed itself remarkable accommodating to all forms of religious life and provided a home within its boundaries for the most diverse religious groups. In many ways the experiment has been extraordinarily successful. Yet history has demonstrated that the privatization of religion via its subordination to an independent standard of political unity was not an unqualified asset. Modern democracies may discourage intolerance and religious strife, but by the same token they are not particularly favorable to an intense spiritual life or to outbursts of religious fervor. Their soil offers scant nourishment for those rare passions that rend the souls of mystics and disclose the heights and depths of authentic religious experience. America, Tocqueville once declared wistfully, has not produced any Pascals. The observation remains unchallenged. In the century and a half that has elapsed since it was made, not much has happened that would cause us to doubt its validity.

Nor, for that matter, does the logic of the system conduce to a significantly high level of public morality. A regime that is more intent on leveling than on raising will not readily allow the goals of freedom and equality to be overshadowed by the pursuit of those civic virtues which the Founders did not deem any less essential to our national well-being and in the development of which they foresaw a major role for religious bodies. Our basic political premise is and has always been utility, and utility, effective though it may be as a means of rallying the consent of the multitude, is not the natural breeding ground of excellence. Under the circumstances it is hardly surprising that one should hear so many complaints about the quality of our common life. For all their prosperity and incredibly high standard of living, Americans do not have all that they could and should have in the way of human fulfillment.

Given this situation, it seemed timely and appropriate that, as part of an ongoing discussion of the ministry undertaken by the various bilateral conversations in this country, one group at least should address itself to the properly moral and spiritual dimensions of the ministerial life and, furthermore, that Methodists and Roman Catholics, in whose respective traditions has always occupied a central place, should be the ones to do so.

STAGES OF DIALOGUE

No one to my knowledge has yet tried to write a phenomenology of that alternately frustrating and rewarding, unimaginative and brilliant, platitudinous and profound, but in any event typically modern and now ubiquitous institution known as the ordinary ecumenical dialogue. My guess is that such a study would reveal an underlying structure that is strikingly similar in all cases, however much external configurations may vary from one to the other. Four overlapping but distinguishable stages may be identified with some measure of accuracy as the process unfolds.

One invariably begins by making an effort to articulate one's own position, only to discover how arduous that simple exercise can be, especially at a time when virtually all religious constituencies are immersed in a frantic quest for self-definition. Little needs to be said about this initial stage since it usually yields no more than a set of provisional formulations to which even their own proponents are reluctant to commit themselves fully. But even a poor formulation is better than nothing at all. It at least serves the useful purpose of marking off the parameters of the terrain to be explored and furnishes something like a working definition of the subject at hand.

Next comes the more prolonged task of clearing the ground or laying bare the hidden biases that stand in the way of mutual understanding. In the present case many of those biases could be linked to the Roman Catholic notion of the sacramentality of holy orders and its concomitant, the indelible character imprinted by holy orders in the soul of the recipient. The doctrine in its actual form is at least as old as Augustine, but it is safe to say that the uses to which it has been put and the abuses to which it has given rise go far beyond anything that is dreamt of in Augustinian theology. To an outsider, at any rate, it often appears fraught with dangerous practical implications. Among other things it may be thought to place undue stress on the intrinsic efficacy of the sacrament at the expense of the personal ethical qualities of the ordained person. It likewise tends to accentuate the gulf between the clergy and the laity, thereby causing the Church to appear more as a hierarchy than as a fellowship. The institutional structures of Church life come to be viewed as a replacement for, rather than a necessary complement to, its charismatic and spiritual component. The eschatological tension, so conspicuously and so fruitfully displayed in the early centuries of Christianity, gradually gives way to an identification of the visible Church with the Kingdom of God, and, instead of allowing itself to be judged by Scripture, the ecclesiastical establishment sets itself up as the supreme authority, usurping the function of Scripture and the Spirit as the rule of faith and the guide of life. Little wonder, then, that over the years the Roman Church should have been vulnerable to the charges of clericalism, authoritarianism, ecclesiastical positivism, and triumphalism that have repeatedly been leveled at it by friends and critics alike.

The stereotyping on the other side of the ecumenical ledger was neither less flagrant nor less damaging. In the eyes of Roman Catholics, Methodist spiritual life suffered from the opposite defects of pietism and subjectivism. In its historical manifestations it was all too often equated with teetotalism joined to a strong aversion for such "innocuous" practices as smoking and gambling. The holier-than-thou attitude that it supposedly fostered was tinged with its own brand of hypocrisy and hidden arrogance. Worse still, it reduced the Christian message to a moralism devoid of dogmatic substance, bred an overriding concern for the purely social or sociological aspects of Christian living, and, by depriving morality of its theological underpinnings, paved the way for the "secularization of spirituality" and the cultural relativism that have been the bane of American Christianity ever since.

In all of this there was little that had not been rehashed time and again before. It is one thing, however, to listen to an objection and its rebuttal and quite another personally to assume the burden of thinking through all of the issues implied in them. Coming out of such diverse backgrounds, the same words often carry a very different freight, apparent similarities conceal subtle divergences, and, conversely, divergent expressions mask a more profound unity, which only a laborious, step-by-step investigation has any chance of uncovering.

As it turned out, both groups were considerably more self-critical than either one had dared to anticipate, which is not to say that they were any less attached to their own traditions or any less eager to exploit the riches inherent in those traditions. Impartiality, after all, is not the same as neutrality and there is no evidence that the latter leads to greater clear-sightedness than the former. Quite the contrary. If the history of the ecumenical movement proves anything, it is that progress along these lines is not to be bought at the price of disloyalty. The lasting gains registered thus far have come about, not by compromising or relativizing the doctrine itself, but by discerning its true intention beneath the frayed historical garb in which it frequently parades. Augustine could announce to the newly baptized and mostly illiterate members of his flock, "I am your Bible"; but far from revealing a secret intent to substitute himself for the authority

of Scripture, this proclamation, shocking as it sounds, was probably motivated by a sincere desire to lead them back to the sacred text, which they could not read and which other people were all too willing to misread for them. Likewise, revivalism may have been a legitimate response to the growing disaffection of the eighteenth-century English or American peasantry toward the Christian faith; but it, too, cannot fairly be thought to epitomize the long-standing Methodist concern with the whole range of spiritual values embodied in the Gospel.

There is more, of course, to an ecumenical dialogue than the mere exchange of ideas across the conference table. Looking back, one's mind is invaded by fond recollections of those too infrequent moments of conviviality during which the thinking machine felt free to become human once again and which, for all anyone knows, may have done more than anything else to dispel any lingering misgivings about the bland pretensions of Methodist virtue or the chilling aloofness of the Roman Catholic clergy.

The stage had thus been set for the constructive phase of the dialogue, which no longer consisted in our looking at one another but in our looking together in the direction to which the common elements of our two traditions pointed. Since the holiness of the ministerial life in unintelligible apart from the holiness of the Church as a whole, which is itself inseparable from God's own holiness, the dynamics of the argument dictated that one turn to the Bible for the ingredients of a reformulation of this threefold problem in accordance with the requirements of our time. Two sets of considerations, the first of which has to do with the biblical notion of holiness and the second with its application to the modern world, will help us bring the contents of the consensus into proper focus.

BIBLICAL HOLINESS

Few concepts are more easily taken for granted by anyone reared in the Christian tradition than that of divine holiness. Even the modern science of religion, best known to most of us through the works of such eminent scholars as Rudolph Otto and Mircea Eliade, has accustomed us to think of all religious phenomena, biblical or otherwise, in terms of the universal or *a priori* category of the "holy." It takes a special effort to realize that what strikes us at first hearing as just another piece of conventional wisdom is in fact a revolutionary idea the likes of which are not be encountered anywhere in pagan antiquity. In the Greco-Roman world *objects* were considered holy, to the extent to which they had been "set aside" for cultic uses, but never the gods or human beings.[2] Only in the biblical religions—and this tells us a great deal about their peculiar character—do we find any mention of, let alone any emphasis on, the holiness of God.

It is not less important to note that the holiness of which the Bible speaks does not refer merely to God's transcendence and incommensurability with all forms of creaturely existence. It has its necessary counterpart in the love and justice that characterize God's dealings with human beings. In the words of Isaiah, "the holy God" of Israel is a God "who shows Himself holy in His righteousness" (5:16). In view of this fact it should come as no great surprise that the pagan gods, whose flagrant injustices were a source of embarrassment to their own devotees, were not described as holy. The early Christian apologists obviously had every reason to deny their holiness; but, what is more interesting, it would not have entered the minds of the pagan writers themselves to speak of them in that light.

Against the backdrop of this uniquely biblical teaching one begins to see why the Church itself is referred to as holy insofar as it is called upon to share in God's own life and to exhibit, both internally and in its relations with other groups, the attributes of love and justice attendant on the biblical concept of holiness. The matter deserves to be examined all the more carefully as it lends itself to a variety of misrepresentations. Suffice it to say for the time being that the holiness predicated of the Church is not only a gift from God, to be accepted with humility and gratitude, but a task for God, to be carried out in a spirit of humaneness and self-giving generosity. Its function, properly understood, is not to sunder but to reconcile and unite. It follows that the Church will be true to its God-given mission, not by cutting itself off from the rest of the world, but by placing itself unstintingly in the service of others. Indeed, it is itself none other than the world reconciled unto itself and unto God: *mundus reconciliatus Ecclesia*.[3] In this perspective the two objections most frequently hurled at Christianity in the modern period—that it promotes intolerance and that it breeds contempt for the world—are revealed to be without solid foundation, even though the Christian churches may have done more than their share to provoke them in the course of their turbulent history.

What we have said of the Church as a global entity applies to its individual members as well. It also applies in a special manner to the ordained minister, whose spirituality is no different in essence from that of any other Christian but who, by reason of his high visibility as a leader of the community, is presumed to typify the way of life of the group that he serves. One cannot effectively preach the word of God, bear

public testimony to the truth of the faith, and above all preside over the eucharistic celebration, wherein the entire life of the Church achieves its highest concentration, if one's commitment to the ideals of the Gospel is belied by the modalities of one's personal conduct. The point scarcely needs to be labored. It is made with utmost clarity in the old chestnut about the preacher who prided himself on his ability to strike fear into the hearts of his listeners, until one of his victims was prompted to comment: "I heard him preach and I was terrified, I saw him eat and I was reassured."

HOLINESS AND THE MODERN WORLD

It goes without saying that no discussion about the nature of Christian spirituality could ever be complete without some attention to the socio-cultural context within which its conclusions are destined to be implemented. Hence the second major thrust of the document, which is to relate the principles enunciated above to the burning moral and social issues of the hour and, in particular, to the specific problems posed by the patterns of evil imbedded in the structures of modern society. There may have been a time in the past when social reform was still only a dim prospect and when one's spiritual energies were all but totally absorbed by more immediate questions of private morality. Such narrowly personal concerns are bound to strike our contemporaries as hollow and hypocritical unless they are accompanied by an equally keen sensitivity to the broad questions of collective justice as they come to the fore in an acquisitive society which distributes wealth and benefits with little regard to the use that is made of them or to the widening gap separating the rich from the poor.

Although the problem may be more acute than ever, it is by no means restricted to our own time and place. Pondering it for a moment will, I hope, give us a truer insight into the nature of Christian spirituality. If, as may be argued, all societies are necessarily imperfect, if each one is to a greater or lesser degree a compact of wickedness,[4] one cannot function as a law-abiding citizen within it, avail himself of its services, and discharge his own obligations toward it without at the same time becoming a party to its inequities. This is not to suggest that each individual is personally accountable for the evils perpetrated or sanctioned by the whole of society but only that he cannot in conscience remain blind to these evils and to the consequences of his own ambiguous involvement in them. Faced with that dilemma, some people would either have us withdraw into a kind of spiritual ghetto or do away with societal structures altogether. Neither solution will work, but then one is left with the urgent necessity of deciding how, in practice, one does live as a Christian or even as a moral person in an immoral society.

The question, as we have come to recognize, is not one that admits of simple answers. It may be that, contrary to what our more optimistic nineteenth-century predecessors had taught us to believe, there are some problems that defy ready-made solutions in this life. Without laying claim to a Solomon-like wisdom that they clearly did not possess, the drafters of the statement could barely do more than point to a few of these problems as well as to the general direction in which one might move in attempting to resolve them. To such problems each generation of Christians is summoned to invent its own response in the midst of a painful but creative tension that will preserve them both from the fanaticism born of false hope and a no less dangerous quietism engendered by discouragement or despair.

This brief account has limited itself by and large to the work accomplished by a small group of representative churchmen and scholars meeting at infrequent intervals over a four-year period.[5] An ecumenical dialogue, however, unlike virtue, is not an end in itself. It will necessarily fall short of its stated goal if the three stages that have been outlined are not complemented by a fourth stage comprising all of the various endeavors in which both churches have been urged to join at the grass-roots level of parish and community life. In general, the efforts expended in this area, while not less productive than those of other groups, have tended to be of a more undifferentiated sort, varying in conformity with local settings and personal initiative. Methodists and Roman Catholics have served side by side as members of interchurch councils, participated together in liturgical or paraliturgical functions, and occasionally evinced a similar attraction for the prophetic role of the Church in society. The one area in which closer collaboration is both promised and called for is that of social action, where a heightened consciousness on the part of the Roman Catholic leadership has happily brought it nearer to the traditional preoccupations of Methodism.

Here as elsewhere work has been hampered of late by financial cutbacks on both sides. God is not dead, He is broke; or at least some of His children are. Ironically, the straitened conditions under which all communions have had to operate could lead to an increased appreciation for the religious aspects of their mission and call forth a new spirit of dedication in a world that is starving not only for lack of food but for lack of adequate spiritual nourishment. One hopes that the present consensus statement will stimulate further thinking along the same or similar lines. It would be tragic indeed if, in a modern society whose internal dislocations have become evident to everyone with eyes to see, the Christian churches were to

jeopardize, through self-defensiveness or the absence of a clear vision, the signal contribution which as organized bodies they alone can make to the healing of our fragmented selves and the restoration of human wholeness.

NOTES

1 *Holiness and Spirituality of the Ordained Ministry: A Report of the United Methodist-Roman Catholic Dialogue-1976* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1976), 15. Editor's Note: "Christian Mission and Spirituality" first appeared in *New Catholic World* (July/August 1977), 191-95.

2 See supra, 230-31.

3 Editor's Note: St. Augustine, *Sermon* 96. "The Church is the world reconciled" to Christ (*mundus reconciliatus*), while the unreconciled world, the *mundus damnatus*, is outside the Church and persecutes it.

4 Cf. *De civitate Dei* XIX.24; cf. supra, 231.

5 For a survey of the deliberations conducted on the international level by a joint commission of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, the reader is referred to two short articles by George Tavard, soon to appear in *The Tablet*. [Editor's Note: Cf. "Methodist Dialogue," *The Tablet* 232 (1978), 197-98 and 230-32.] The commission has spent much of its time discussing the documents promulgated by other ecumenical dialogues, together with such practical matters as mixed marriages and birth control. It has not yet published an official statement of its own.

25

ECUMENISM—WHERE DO WE Go FROM HERE?

Even if Vatican II had accomplished nothing else, it would deserve to be remembered as the Council that launched the Roman Catholic Church, belatedly but vigorously, on the path of ecumenism.[1] It would be naïve to think, however, that because ecumenism has become fashionable in both inner and outer Roman Catholic circles, an adequate solution to the problems that it raises is in sight. The true magnitude of those problems is only now becoming apparent to most of us and, as it does, the healthy but somewhat juvenile enthusiasm generated by the Council has tended to give way to a more sober approach to the question of Church unity as a whole. There is even a general feeling abroad that the ecumenical movement is foundering, at least momentarily. This appears to be especially true in Europe, for political and other reasons peculiar to the Western European countries and different in each one; but the noises that have been reaching us from various quarters suggest that a similar crisis is developing in this country as well. Struck by the same phenomenon, a columnist in the secular press recently went so far as to propose that what the movement most needed at the present time was "a pious kick in the pants."

The sources of the crisis, particularly as it affects college students, are manifold and run the gamut from confusion, impatience with Church practice and discipline, shallow ecumenical experimentation, latent or open hostility toward the institutional Church and, in a growing number of more extreme cases, the total loss of Christian identity. All of these symptoms, as nearly as I can make out, may be analyzed under two broad headings: rash or vulgar ecumenism and indifferentism.

VULGAR ECUMENISM AND INDIFFERENTISM

By rash, vulgar, or unreflecting ecumenism I mean the kind of ecumenism that presupposes unity where it does not exist or acts as if it did even in cases where it is conspicuously absent. Vulgar ecumenism does not remove prejudice but hallows it by substituting a pan-ecumenical prejudice for an anti-ecumenical prejudice. It is essentially eclectic or opportunist and ignores the inner transformation that must take place within each one of us before an authentic communion of faith can be reconstructed from the *membra disjecta* of a divided Christendom. For that reason it is generally sterile and self-defeating, however much it may recommend itself by its apparent open-mindedness. It does not achieve and often hinders genuine understanding by fostering a type of relativism that runs counter to the deeper and more serious intentions of the ecumenical movement. The practice of intercommunion, on which recent discussions have centered, is a case in point. I for one, speaking theologically and leaving practical or pastoral considerations aside for the moment, would be tempted to take a broader stand on the matter than some of our leading ecumenists; but it cannot be denied that the problem is not as easily settled as a certain brand of facile ecumenism would seem to imply.

By indifferentism I mean the relativization not only of the various forms of Christian faith but of the faith itself, provoked or hastened in many cases by the presumed inability of the Christian churches to agree on the fundamentals of their common belief and predicated on the mistaken assumption that because church unity is desirable and demanded, it must be actual or immediately accessible at all times. To the extent to which it seeks to articulate itself in terms of a philosophically coherent position, religious indifferentism jettisons the past in the name of an historical consciousness that is totally exhausted by the radical newness of an indeterminate but glowing future. Indifferentism makes interfaith dialogue impossible by removing the common ground that constitutes the precondition of any real discussion. At best, it conduces to a vague "secular ecumenism" which solves the problem only by denying its existence.

Ecumenism itself has sometimes been blamed for both of these excesses. It would perhaps be difficult to deny that its practice has occasionally brought to light certain personal or theological weaknesses latently present in the would-be ecumenist,[2] but there is otherwise little evidence to support the contention that it poses a serious threat to anyone's faith. The real danger, as far as college students are concerned, does not

stem from ecumenism as such but from crude misconceptions regarding its nature and, to an even greater degree, from broad cultural causes only incidentally related to it. Today's better students are generous, enthusiastic, intellectually alert, and often more sensitive than their predecessors to the great social needs of our time. They have few of the atavistic inhibitions of their elders. They travel more than they used to, and their frequent exposure to a large number of heterogeneous and at times exotic experiences helps to develop in them a certain worldly wisdom which might have seemed out of place in their opposite numbers of a short generation ago. But they generally lack the experience of profound attachments to profound things. Their tastes have been given little formation and it is rare to find among them an understanding of life and of themselves that is the result of thoughtful study of a prolonged meditation on any serious book, whether it be the Bible, Shakespeare, or even Dostoyevsky. Their ideas are the ideas they absorb with the air that they breathe or through their contact with the cultures and sub-cultures to which they happen to belong. All appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, these ideas, although passionately defended, do not as a rule strike deep roots in them, and anyone who is accustomed to dealing with such students on a daily basis knows from experience how fragile their most "unshakable" convictions, religious or otherwise, can be.[3]

GENUINE ECUMENISM

If this diagnosis is correct, what is needed is not less ecumenical education but a more genuine ecumenical education, that is to say, an education that is not blind to the differences between the churches but takes these differences seriously, an education that does not short-circuit the process of Christian unity by weakening one's commitment to a cherished tradition but presupposes and enhances that commitment as the sole means of achieving a proper understanding of and respect for another person's commitment.

Genuine ecumenism is basically loyal and it looks for the same loyalty in others. It thus necessarily implies a painful tension between the desire for unity on the one hand and faithfulness to one's own heritage on the other. It can be sympathetic and fully open toward other Christians precisely because it does not succumb to the temptation of universal sympathy that is typical of the spurious ecumenism referred to earlier. Universal sympathy is problematic, if not altogether illusory, insofar as it requires that one bracket one's personal attachment to his faith and that he provisionally espouse another's attachment as his own. It is hard to see how such a posture could be more than a pretense. The problem with it from an ecumenical point of view is that it actually precludes any profound encounter with persons of a different religious persuasion. Since it operates on the principle of a histrionic rather than a serious identification with the other, it necessarily misses what is most important in him, the depth of his total commitment. It cannot be indulged in consistently without a subtle demotion and hence an implicit disrespect of all religious positions. Like Descartes' methodical doubt, to which it bears a definite epistemological affinity, it destroys the very object that it is striving to preserve without being able to guarantee its miraculous recovery. Upon close analysis, it reveals itself as more superficial than profound, more arrogant than humble, and more provincial than truly universal.

One hardly needs to add that the faithfulness required by true ecumenism seeks more than the simple preservation of one's heritage. It is ever ready to accept renewal or death to what is old in oneself as an essential condition of that faithfulness. In a word, it sees its tradition as a living tradition and implies above all faithfulness to the creative impulse to which it owes its origin or its greatness and which hopefully continues to be operative in it.

At all events, the current debate about the pros and cons of ecumenism is bound to appear parochial against the larger background of modern thought and the breakdown of sociological Christianity. One cannot begin to discuss the problem without taking into account what Carl Braaten calls "the invisible partner" in the contemporary theological enterprise, modern secular man.[4] It is no mere coincidence that ecumenism should have come into existence at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, that is to say, at the very moment when the Christian churches were compelled to face squarely for the first time the issue of their relevance to the modern world in the totality of its historical and social development. The sense of urgency created by this situation cannot be overemphasized. As matters stand, the search for Christian unity is not likely to be determined solely or perhaps even principally by the relationship of one Christian church to another. The differences between various Christian groups all but pale into insignificance in a disenchanted, dehumanized, and already largely post-ecumenical world or in a world which is seen as such by a new generation of enlightened, albeit confused, college students. As one prominent ecumenist put it recently, any argument about the merits or demerits of the ecumenical movement in the broad context of modern secularity will soon end up sounding like a discussion of the principles of navigation on the deck of a sinking ship.

THE ROLE OF THE THEOLOGIAN

With this I come to the central question raised by the title of the present communication, the specific role of the college theologian in promoting ecumenism in our society. That question may be answered most simply in the light of the foregoing remarks by saying that the college teacher is in a unique position to endow the ecumenical movement with a sorely needed intellectual dimension. The experience of the past twenty-five years or more has made it abundantly clear that the cause of Christian reunion will not be sufficiently advanced simply by having Christians of various stripes engage in common social action, improve their relations with one another, or exchange impressions over tea. Sooner or later people will have to come together, book in hand, for the purpose of exploring jointly the intellectual and historical roots of their traditional divisions. By and large such efforts have hitherto been restricted to small and scattered groups of theologians and scholars. If, in accordance with the recommendations of Vatican II's *Decree on Ecumenism*, the work of these scholars is to bear fruit, its results will have to be extended beyond the confines of narrow professional circles. The privileged breeding ground of this renewed and intellectually competent ecumenism could very well be the substantial number of interested students currently enrolled in our colleges. Not that all of these students are equally prepared for such endeavors or equally eager to participate in them. Far from it. Indeed, a majority of them do not have a sufficient grasp of their own religious tradition to engage in a meaningful study of its ecumenical implications. But the few who do, or are willing to acquire it, could accomplish much in the long run to change the ecumenical picture at the level of the grass-roots, which has yet to be attained.

The last five years or so have happily witnessed a number of promising developments in that direction. To speak only of Catholic colleges, the first significant step was to alter the perspective of the usual courses by taking a more positive stance toward Protestant thought and by granting to it a more prominent place in the presentation of Christian doctrine. But this was obviously not enough. Faced with widespread ignorance of other Christian traditions on the part of most of their students, Catholic colleges were soon prompted to add to their curriculum new courses dealing thematically with Protestant and, in rarer instances, Orthodox theology, as well as with the nature and history of the ecumenical movement. A third flank was turned shortly afterwards when, in a move that was considered bold at the time but has since become commonplace, Catholic colleges began sharing faculty members and resources with non-Catholic schools or adding non-Catholic theologians to the staffs of their own departments.

It is difficult to say at this point just how effective these measures have been. Although they augur well for the future, there is a legitimate concern that the sole presence of Protestants on Catholic campuses and Catholics on Protestant campuses could result in a mere juxtaposition rather than a thorough integration of ecumenical efforts.[5] To offset that possibility, new ways of bringing the two groups into closer cooperation are being sought. One modest but forward-looking experiment along these lines is the recently established Ecumenical Institute of Religious Studies at Assumption College, which, at the time of its inception in 1967, was the only program of its kind in this country or elsewhere. The Institute is remarkable in that it is itself a total product of ecumenicity. Founded at the request of the Worcester Area Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Worcester, it is ecumenical not only in scope but in its very structure, being administered and staffed by Protestants and Catholics alike and geared to the common needs of all Christian communities in the area. In this important respect it differs from other theological schools, which, although now open for the most part to persons of different faiths, are nevertheless organized along predominantly confessional or interdenominational lines; and it differs from professional schools of theology in secular universities, which have become considerably more ecumenical in their orientation than they once were, but which prescind from one's commitment of faith and ordinarily approach religion as an objective historical and cultural phenomenon.[6] It is likewise significant that instead of dealing frontally with the issue of Christian disunity the Institute has chosen to tackle the problem from a different angle by focusing on the common concerns arising out of the encounter of revealed religion with modern scientific and humanistic world views. The core of the Institute is a graduate program leading to an M.A. in Religious Studies, but through the various activities that it sponsors and through such courses as are open to qualified college students, it has already had a noticeable impact on the undergraduate population.

CONCLUSION

Here again, only time will enable us to assess the wisdom and the practicality of the formula. The partial but encouraging success with which the Institute has met so far is attributable in large measure to a variety of factors not always to be found in the same happy combination elsewhere, such as a local population that is almost evenly divided between Protestants and Catholics, progressive leadership on both sides of the ecumenical divide, the relative proximity of a major theological center like Boston, and generous financial support from local foundations. In any case, its progress is being watched with a mixture of hope and

skepticism by a number of people interested in duplicating the program or experimenting with some modification of it in other places.

One hardly dares to be optimistic about any program of studies these days, let alone a program of religious studies. Still, one cannot remain insensitive to the surge of new possibilities that these and similar developments have caused us to experience. It has been said with a good deal of penetration that modern thought is on the whole characterized by limited goals and high expectations. Having lived through the agonies of modern man's repeated failure to attain even these moderate goals, the time has perhaps come for us to raise our sights once again, even if the effort is to be accompanied by something less than absolute expectations.

NOTES

1 Editor's Note: "Ecumenism—Where Do We Go from Here?" originally appeared in *Theology in Revolution*, ed. George Devine (Staten Island, New York: College Theology Society, 1970), 86-94.

2 As seems to have been the case with Charles Davis; cf. George H. Tavard, "Ecumenism and Religious Indifference," *Chicago Studies* (1968), 211-12.

3 The most perceptive article that I have read on the subject is that of Allan Bloom, "The Crisis of Liberal Education," in Robert A. Goldwin, ed., *Higher Education and Modern Democracy* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965), 121-39.

4 Carl E. Braaten, "Toward a Theology of Hope," *Theology Today*, July 1967. Reprinted in Martin E. Marty and Dean C. Peerman, eds., *New Theology No. 5* (New York: MacMillan, 1968), 109.

5 See also the pertinent remarks by Gerard S. Sloyan, "The New Role of the Study of Religion in Higher Education: What Does It Mean?" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (Winter 1969), 12.

6 On the subject of the difference between the teaching of religion in secular universities and in theological schools, cf. Thomas E. Ambrogi, "The Catholic University in an Ecumenical Age," *NCEA Bulletin* 42 (November 1967), 23-24.

VI

SELECTED RESPONSES AND REMARKS

26

PUBLIC THEOLOGY: A RESPONSE TO MAX STACKHOUSE

George Orwell gave 1984 as the year in which truth would disappear and language would lose its meaning. He could just as easily have called it the year in which new cults would proliferate and new pleas for a public theology would be issued.[1] The meaning in either case would have been the same. We should have no reason to plead for the development or restoration of a public theology if our society were healthy and still governed by a viable consensus regarding the most fundamental issues.

As matters stand, there is no such consensus abroad and no evidence that any is about to emerge. Ours is an age characterized by what Heidegger described as the disintegration and cataclysmic crash of all horizons of meaning and value. It is an age that has witnessed the erosion of its most cherished goals and ideals; an age that has been stripped of its pretensions and whose inner contradictions have been exposed for everyone to see; an age whose confidence in the future has been shaken by two World Wars, the possibility (if not the prospect) of a third, the depletion of our natural resources, and the gradual but unremitting devastation of vast areas of the globe; an age, in short, in which conviction, to the extent that it exists, is grounded in neither reason nor Revelation. Even freedom and science, once the two most powerful forces in the Western world, have ceased to command universal respect. All efforts to reconcile them having failed, they are now engaged in a process of mutual destruction. The former is threatened by totalitarianism or scientific tyranny; the latter is rejected in the name of an irrational freedom that refuses to assign any limits to the malleability of human nature or to recognize any objective norms of human conduct.

The situation, which is without precedent in history, has been with us for quite some time. It was brought forcefully to the attention of the European public as far back as 1919 by Paul Valéry in a famous article[2] (originally published in England) that began with the ominous words, “We, civilizations, we know now that we are mortal!” Valéry’s article, written almost entirely under the aegis of Nietzsche, rightly diagnosed the crisis as first and foremost an intellectual crisis. The West was in trouble, not because its economy was in shambles or because its existence was menaced by powerful enemies from without, as it had been at other moments in its history, but because it had repudiated virtually everything that it traditionally stood for. It was critically wounded, finished perhaps, because it no longer believed in itself or in the justice of its principles. Of the three elements of which it was compounded—Christianity, Greek philosophy, and Roman law—none was likely to survive the catastrophe in recognizable form. The blow was all the more cruel as it was self-inflicted. Westerners were unable to defend the superiority of their culture for the simple reason that they had renounced the standards by which that superiority could be established. They were at a loss to demonstrate that truth should prevail over error because they had finally decided that the distinction between them was unclear. Nothing was true or false, everything was relative. It was hardly surprising that, in this severe “mental disorder,” cultivated Europe should have observed

> the rapid revival of innumerable ideas: dogmas, philosophies, heterogeneous ideals; the three hundred ways of elucidating the Word; the thousand and one nuances of Christianity; the two dozen assorted shades of positivism. The whole spectrum of intellectual light displayed its matchless colors, shedding a strange, contradictory glimmer over the agony of the European soul. While scientists feverishly sought in their imaginations and in the annals of yesteryear the means to be rid of barbed wire, to avoid submarines, to paralyze the flight of planes, the soul invoked all at once all the incantations that it knew and gave serious consideration to the strangest prophecies; it sought refuges, indications, consolations throughout the whole record of memories, of earlier activities, of ancestral attitudes. And these are the known products of anxiety, the disorderly enterprises of the brain which run from reality to nightmare and back from nightmare to reality, distracted like a rat in a trap.

Valéry's main concern, needless to add, was not that the human species might be extinguished. The bomb was still twenty-five years away and modern science had not yet come up with the means of blowing up the planet. No, life would go on, but it was in danger of becoming a diminished and impoverished life, dedicated only to the satisfaction of one's bodily needs, the pursuit of equality rather than of excellence, and, lest boredom should set in, the cultivation of an indefinite variety of decadent art forms. Spengler was even more pessimistic. By the time the final version of the *Decline of the West* was written,[3] he had come to the conclusion that what Valéry regarded as still only a possibility was an absolute certainty. The future belonged to Nietzsche's "last man," whose hegemony could no longer be averted. More than ever before, human beings would be in touch with one another, but, having replaced the morning prayer with the morning paper, they would cease to be in touch with anything higher than themselves. Moreover, insofar as Western civilization was the only universal civilization, that is to say, the only civilization capable of understanding all the others, its demise heralded the demise of civilization *tout court*. A global "fellahinism" was in store for all of us.

Many of these lurid motifs were passed on to a younger generation of American students toward the mid-sixties through such best sellers as John A.T. Robinson's *Honest to God* and Harvey Cox's *The Secular City*, but more as an object of intellectual curiosity than as a matter of vital human concern. Certainly their impact in this country was never as profound as it had been on the European continent. Americans are an optimistic breed. They are not easily swayed by abstract ideas and find greater satisfaction in going about their daily business than in brooding over the fate of empires and civilizations. Nihilism is not their style, even when they speak its language, and the literature dealing with it has yet to become their favorite reading. They prefer Tolstoy to Dostoyevsky, do not take well to Céline, and generally make very poor existentialists.

The same guardedly optimistic attitude is reflected in Professor Stackhouse's article, only the latest in a long series of attempts calculated to alert us to the precariousness of our situation and the need to do something about it. Like his predecessors, Stackhouse is aware of the "normlessness into which post-Enlightenment thought has been plunged," of the absence of any "metaphysical moral vision as to what is Really Real," of the "cacophony of religious opinions" to which we are daily treated, and of the "philosophically undernourished, socially divided, religiously confused, and theologically illiterate" character of our time. Oddly enough, however, he does not appear to be greatly moved by this alarming state of affairs. For Nietzsche and those who followed him, the death of God was a catastrophe, an intimation of the terribleness of life without any compelling metaphysical horizon. It signaled the onset of a new "world night" and meant that humanity would henceforth be "straying as through an infinite nothing." The consequences were as dire as they were unpredictable. For Stackhouse, the same affliction is not a potentially fatal illness but a "malaise," a "dis-ease" (his spelling), a minor discomfort, as it were, from which, given the right prescription, we might soon hope to recover.

Mild ailments call for a gentle treatment. The one offered by Stackhouse takes the form of a "public theology," by which is meant, not indeed the whole of theology, but that part of it which concerns itself with and is directly applicable to socio-political life. Such a theology is of necessity both ecumenical and broadly human. It recommends itself because it favors a rational approach to the problems with which it deals and is in constant dialogue with the other human disciplines, whether they be philosophy, science, social theory, or political philosophy. It takes it for granted that the teachings of the various faiths, though not necessarily true, are "meaningful," and that their meaning can be made accessible to believers and nonbelievers alike. For that reason it is capable of uniting everyone in a common quest for a common truth. It also serves as a much needed antidote to the dogmatism of either "Fundamentalism" or "'Liberationism," as well as a corrective to the privatizing tendencies of the one and the unthinking activism of the other. Not the least of its many advantages is that it has a better chance of providing the guidance that we seek. Hence its superiority over what, for some time now, other scholars have been calling "civil religion." Civil religion may help to unify a given society, but, as a product of that society and a mere reflection of its needs and aspirations, it has no critical function to perform in regard to it. Public theology, on the other hand, is anchored in a cosmic order that transcends all particular societies and thus supplies us with a set of principles that can be used to judge or criticize any of them.

The proposed solution is so neat and commonsensical that one wonders why nobody had yet thought of it. The simple answer to that question is that the argument which claims to support it is perfectly circular. If, as so many of our leading thinkers seem to believe, reason itself is the issue, if it is only a Western prejudice, if it is superficial, and if the "Really Real" does not disclose itself through its medium, calling upon it to solve our problems will do little to advance the debate. From that point of view, Alasdair MacIntyre's philosophical approach, with which Stackhouse is not altogether pleased, sounds more

promising. It at least acknowledges the necessity of coming to grips with the modern attack on reason on its own grounds and of demonstrating its inadequacy before any rational reordering in society or of our disoriented selves can take place. Its strength lies in the fact that even the philosophic critics of reason must use reason to defend their position and hence cannot dismiss it as irrelevant. The same cannot be said of theology, which has long been associated with some of our deepest divisions and is not so easily transformed into an instrument of public discourse.

Stackhouse thinks that unity can be achieved on a theological level because he is convinced that philosophy itself is grounded in religion. Our forebears did not always share that conviction. They were still close enough to the original problem to sense that at some point or other the demands of faith and those of reason were bound to come into conflict; and, although they struggled valiantly to bridge the gulf between them, they were aware of the limits of any such endeavor. Their modest goal was to find a solution that would respect the legitimate claims and preserve the integrity of each of these two great sources of knowledge. Stackhouse wants to do better. Since, for him, reason is fundamentally theological and theology fundamentally rational, the harmony between them is guaranteed in advance. A sure sign of this, he says, is to be found in the (accidental) fact that the whole legacy of Aristotelian philosophy was handed down to us through the mediating agency of the medieval schoolmen. His position is the exact opposite of the one held by the old librarian in Umberto Eco's now famous *The Name of the Rose*, who was willing to go to any extreme in order to prevent the dissemination of Aristotle's works, realizing as he did that the discovery of each new treatise led by an implacable logic to further encroachments on the domain of faith.

It follows that Stackhouse's own proposal is or should be acceptable to everyone on both philosophic and theological grounds. Any problem that might arise in this connection can be disposed of by a judicious appeal to the traditional *loci theologici,* which for present purposes are reduced to the "so-called quadralateral" of scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. All four of these sources turn out to be highly flexible, however, and Stackhouse's understanding of them is such as to raise doubts about their normative character. To cite only one example, Christians are reminded that in dealing with contemporary issues they ought to take the Bible into account; they are also summoned to discover not only what it meant *then* but what it means *now*. It is as much our task to judge the sacred text as it is to allow ourselves to be judged by it. We may have something to learn from it, but it too has something to learn from us. The trouble is that the principles by which the interpretation is supposedly guided are never made fully clear and are perhaps nonexistent. All is interpretation, which is just another way of saying that nothing is interpretation. Interpretation is necessarily interpretation in the light of something that is not itself subject to interpretation. Without a "text" of some sort, however broadly conceived, one lapses into sheer relativism. Earlier theologians tried to solve the problem by establishing what they called a "rule of faith," which they were careful to lay out in as precise and cogent a manner as possible. They may have been wrong, but they were consistent. Either the Christian faith means something or it does not. If it does, it is incumbent upon us to determine its meaning and show how it relates to all subsequent elaborations or figurative expressions of it. My fear is that from criteria as easily manipulable as the ones that we are now being offered one can arrive at almost any system of thought or program of action. There is also a strong likelihood that that system or program will conform to one's preconceived notion of what we should all be thinking and doing at the present moment.

Predictably, the content of Stackhouse's public theology is all but indistinguishable from the liberal democratic ethos of our day. The God of that theology remains somewhat elusive, but we do know that He is in favor of such things as democracy, human rights, natural law, social justice, pluralism, free speech, toleration, the self-determination of peoples, limited government, the institutional separation of Church and State, a profound commitment to values, the liberation of the oppressed classes, ecumenism, and the ordination of women. Conversely and for the same reasons, He is against theocracy, feudalism, fanaticism, classism, colonialism, racism, sexism, torture, slavery, and the exploitation of the masses. He is obviously of the opinion that in the past the whole world was mad because it engaged in or tolerated so many of these abuses and He works slowly through history to root them out, gradually replacing them with patterns of democratic justice. Finally, He is undecided about the freeze and neutral as regards the choice between social democracy and democratic socialism. In simple words, the truth of the Gospel and possibly of all other great religious texts is some form or other of late twentieth-century liberal thought.

The conclusion is all the more striking as the New Testament has practically nothing to say about any of these things. For better or for worse, it is notoriously indifferent to questions of political organization, societal arrangements, public reform, and most of what now goes under the ambiguous name of "social justice." It does not favor, let alone prescribe, any particular regime and leaves it up to us to devise whatever system of governance may be best suited to our needs and circumstances. One can certainly prefer

our system to all others and most of us do, but not on the basis of what one reads or, more precisely, does not read about it in the New Testament. Stackhouse is inclined to find the warrants for liberal democracy in the Bible because he tacitly accepts the Nietzschean view, later propagated by Max Weber and countless others, that the foundations of everything are religious. Like Flaubert's Homais, he really prefers chlorine water to holy water, but like Homais' opponent, the abbé Bournisien, he insists on calling it holy water.

Nietzsche had his own motives for thinking that religion was the source of all that is most powerful in the world. He saw clearly that modern life could be regenerated only through a serious commitment to values, but, having given up on reason, he had to look elsewhere for their grounding. In the process, he gave to the term "value" its modern meaning. Values represent what is highest in life and tell us more about it than science—it is more important to know that the cow is sacred than that it weighs eight hundred pounds; but they are not rational. They are the products of our mysterious and creative selves and exist only by virtue of their having been freely chosen by us. As objects of our deepest concern, they belong to the sphere of the "holy" and take on a religious aura. Unfortunately, they tend to differ among themselves and are forever colliding with one another. To be committed to them means only one thing: war, division, conflict, and exploitation. As Weber would later say, "fate" and not reason is what determines the outcome of the struggles in which the gods are perpetually locked. The prospect is a frightening one. Accepting it was the price that, rightly or wrongly, Nietzsche thought one had to pay for human greatness.

For reasons that are not hard to understand, his twentieth-century disciples were unable to countenance this unbearably harsh teaching. They agreed that values are indispensable to a properly human life but were determined that they should not be allowed to clash. Happily, they could be changed. If one discovers, for example, that the biblical God is a sexist, one does not ask why—there are some questions about which it is forbidden to think—one tampers with the Bible. Openness becomes the chief virtue. It takes precedence over everything else, even human rights, if need be. It matters little that other civilizations and other religious traditions do not share this openness and persist in thinking that their way is the true way. With values as Protean as these, however, our commitments risk losing much of their depth. One begins to see why there is so little commitment left in our society, except among those whom Stackhouse brands as extremists.

All of this leads to the suspicion that Stackhouse's "metaphysical-moral" vision is rather more moral than metaphysical. That vision is not exactly new. It has been around since the 1930s, even though it has taken it a lot of time to reach our distant shores. Whether it will do for us what it has not done for others remains to be seen. The postulate on which it rests is the latest version of the Western democratic creed, the one German philosophers have been hammering out for fifty years and which, in the spirit of ecumenism, Stackhouse is eager to propagate at home and abroad. Its basic contention is that the world would be a better place to live in if we all became universal scientific democrats with an evangelical bent. Since Stackhouse has yet to give us his reasons for adopting it—so far his thoughts have been presented only in the form of "opinions"—it may be wise to reserve judgment and wait before deciding whether, in the present case, the appeal to divine authority is a proof of strength or a sign of weakness. I notice only that in Aristotle's *Politics* the democrats are likewise the ones who swear by the gods in order to bolster their cause. The contemporary advocates of civil religion may not have discovered the solution to the nagging dilemmas of our troubled and disenchanted world, and Stackhouse's criticism of them, with which I concur, is very much to the point. Still, they seem to have a better sense of what it would take to make such a solution work. What we really need is a genuine recovery of both philosophy and theology, but for that, I am afraid, we shall have to be patient.

NOTES

1 Editor's Note: The following article is one of several responses given to Max L. Stackhouse's "An Ecumenist's Plea for a Public Theology" in *This World* 8 (Spring/Summer 1984), 47-79. Fortin's response was on pages 97-103.

2 Paul Valéry, "La crise de l'esprit," in *Oeuvres,* Bibliothèque de la Pleiade, Vol. 1 (Paris:Gallimard, 1957), 988-1004.

3 2 vols, New York: A.A. Knopf, 1926-1928.

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RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS: A RESPONSE TO ROBERT BELLAH

Let me say, first of all, how much I appreciated Professor Bellah's presentation and how much I personally gained from it.[1] Since I tend to agree with most of what he said, my remarks will take the form not so much of a criticism as of a demand for further clarification. I know that many of you are eager to put your own questions to him, so I will be as brief as possible.

THE CRISIS OF THE PRESENT AGE

The paper, as I read it, contains both a diagnosis of the crisis of "the present age," to quote the title of a famous essay on the subject, and a suggestion as to how that crisis could be met. I begin with a word about the diagnosis.

One gathers from what we have heard that something is radically wrong with our Western society, and, furthermore, that we are all aware of it by now. A reviewer in the *New York Times* recently quoted Dr. Johnson as saying, "When one is tired of London, one is tired of life, for there is in London all that life can afford." Much has happened since the eighteenth century, and I doubt whether anyone today thinks that there is in American life or Western life generally everything that is to be found in life. We ain't got all that we could have and perhaps ought to have.

The chief culprit, it seems, is technological reason, the abuse of which has devastated our landscape, polluted our streams and our atmosphere, trivialized and bureaucratized human existence, led to a general breakdown of society, and all but destroyed our soul. In short, the current depression is not restricted to any one sphere, economic or otherwise; it has to do with the overall quality of modern life, both physical and spiritual, which may have been damaged beyond repair by the scientific developments of recent centuries.

As for the solution to the problem, if there is a solution, the suggestion is that we have something to learn from the once despised primitive societies—the reason being that, for all their alleged backwardness, some of these societies have succeeded to a remarkable degree in preserving what we so desperately need. The plausibility of the suggestion is reinforced by the example of our own counter-culture, which has demonstrated, to the surprise of many of us, the power of attraction that certain facets of primitive society still hold for modern man. The focus of interest in this regard is not the everyday life of the so-called "primitive" man, whatever its merits may be, but the ecstatic, effervescent, communal, or rhapsodic component of his existence, that is to say, precisely that side of human life which has been submerged and perhaps irretrievably lost in modern technological society.

To illustrate by means of a different example, I remember being present two or three years ago at a lecture given by Dr. Henry Chadwick, of Oxford University, on the origin of the word "ecumenical." The gist of the lecture was that the word was first used in antiquity, not by Christians (as one might have thought) but by associations of Dionysiac actors, who met once a year for what they called an "ecumenical council," and that the present-day ecumenical movement could probably stand a mild infusion of Dionysiac fervor. I take it that, according to Dr. Bellah, the same would be true of modern society as a whole, and I, for one, wholeheartedly concur.

All of this is not meant to rule out the possibility that the historical religions could still have their own specific role to play in the hoped-for rejuvenation of modern life. The emphasis nonetheless is on primitive society and religion and their eventual contribution to the restoration of our lost wholeness. It is, therefore, to that aspect of the problem that the following observations will address themselves first and foremost.

MYTH AND SCIENCE

With that, I come to my queries, or perhaps I should say "misunderstandings," since we were warned at

the outset that the position advocated could easily lend itself to various types of misunderstandings. The first of these concerns the manner in which a reconciliation could be effected between the two types of rationalities mentioned, one represented paradigmatically by myth and the other by modern science. My objection—if that is the proper word—is derived in part, though not entirely, from Max Weber and is anticipated to some extent in the paper. Does not the process of intellectualization in which Western society has been engaged for centuries preclude any such reconciliation? The liveliest experiences of primitive man, we are told, are informed and mediated by myth, symbol, ritual, and the like. But there is nonetheless a significant difference between a "real" myth and what one might call a conscious or fabricated myth. The example of the counter-culture to the contrary notwithstanding, one finds it difficult to imagine modern man in general identifying with "the people of the dreamtime" and "actually becoming them," even if only for the duration of the celebration in the course of which the myth is reenacted. Perhaps the modern soul has been transformed by science to such a degree that it will never be able to recapture the throbbing immediacy of aboriginal life. If it is true, as Weber contends, that we live in a disenchanted, denumenized, and desacralized world, any attempt to bring science and myth into the compass of a single, unitary system may be artificial and doomed to failure. One is entitled to speak of complementarity in the case of distinct but compatible phenomena, but hardly so if the phenomena are mutually exclusive, unless, of course, someone is willing to have one's life in two altogether different compartments.

Following Durkheim's lead, the paper distinguishes sharply between two fundamental phases of primitive societal life, the phase of everyday (predominantly economic) activity and a concentrated or effervescent phase in which all customary differentiations are momentarily obliterated and the life of the community achieves its peak of intensity. The burden of the paper was to suggest that we stand to learn something of importance from primitive society in regard to the latter phase but very little, if anything, in regard to the former. For the sake of argument and at the risk of paradoxical oversimplification, I would like to propose just the opposite: we may have more to learn from the everyday life of the Australian native than from his other, presumably more exciting life.

It struck me as I read along that primitive society had managed to preserve a natural relationship between man and his environment that we might do well to try to emulate. Throughout the paper, science is tacitly identified with Baconian or Cartesian science, that is to say, with a science that is essentially ordered to the conquest of nature. Not having set out to conquer nature, primitive man has never been compelled to face the issue of what that conquest might do to the conqueror. Without turning our backs on natural science or going back to the loin cloth and the spinning wheel, it might be to our advantage to reconsider the possibility of restoring to science its original and properly human dimension as a more adequate means of overcoming the deadly dichotomies and artificially created alienations of modern life.

To state the issue more cogently: If modern science and its attendant technology is the root of our problem, then maybe this is what we ought to zero in on. One does not solve the problem of modern existence simply by adding a touch of *corrobbori* to it, however enticing that prospect may be. Any such attempt to bridge the gulf between the two worlds is bound to appear as just another futile rear-guard action. It does not dissolve but rather enshrines the dichotomies that were to blame for our malaise in the first place and that have since come back to plague us en masse.

THE RICHER LIFE

My second question is a brief one. Assuming that we all feel the need for a richer, fuller, and more rewarding life, is there any way of stating more concretely what the content of that life might be? What the experience of primitive society demonstrates, it seems to me, is that every society needs to supplement its daily life and compensate for its deficiencies with some form of transpolitical activity. Hence I have no trouble understanding the vital and highly integrated character of primitive life, supported by a genuine myth. But I do not see the myth supporting anything higher or opening up on the private sphere of authentically autonomous thought, which alone is the condition of true freedom. (The original myth may be admirably adapted to the character of primitive society, but it leaves untapped a significant reserve of human potential.) Even at its best, Durkheim's primitive society appears to be hardly more than a glorified "city of pigs" in the Platonic sense. This is in a way a compliment, since the city of pigs is a wonderful place and all the more so since there are no pigs in it, real or metaphorical. It does leave something to be desired, however, and that something may be the essential ingredient of the richer, fuller, and more rewarding life we all seek.

METHODOLOGY

The third question is of a more general nature and has to do with the methodological approach to the

problem at hand. We were reminded at the start that the discussion would be "informed by social science and historical scholarship" but that, at the same time, certain questions that science and scholarship can never answer would be raised, namely, questions of ends. The only other form of human knowledge expressly alluded to besides science, as far as I can see, is the non-conceptual mode of consciousness or representation exemplified by myth, symbol, dreams, poetry, and so on. The question is: To what universe of discourse does Professor Bellah's own argument belong? To the extent to which it deals with ends, it would seem to fall outside the pale of science as it is here defined, and yet one hesitates to qualify it as mythical. Should one think of a combination of the two, or is there perhaps some other alternative to which no explicit reference has thus far been made? The little that is said on this subject leaves me somewhat perplexed. I realize, of course, that what has been presented this evening is only a small part of a larger study, in which, I presume, many of these questions are taken up and explored at much greater length.

My comments have turned out to be slightly longer than I expected. I had the misfortune of getting interested in the paper, but that may after all be the best tribute that one could pay to its author.[2]

NOTES

1 Editor's Note: The following response to Robert N. Bellah's "The Roots of Religious Consciousness: Primitive Religion and the Counter-Culture" was given on 7 April 1975, at an event sponsored by the Boston University Institute for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology.

2 Editor's Note: Fortin also appended the following: "To repeat the questions: 1) Does the proposal that is made hallow the dichotomy between myth and science? Is it a matter of peaceful coexistence of the two? How are they integrated? 2) Does the complement suggested to us by the effervescent side of primitive life represent what is most needed to enliven modern life or should we not also be thinking of something else and perhaps something more important? 3) Is the present discourse scientific, and, if so, in what sense?"

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THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND FREEDOM: CRITICAL REMARKS ON ERNEST VAN DEN HAAG'S "THE DESOLATION OF REALITY"

I gather from what we have just heard that Professor van den Haag is not enamored of the French Enlightenment and, by extension, of the Enlightenment *tout court*.[1] He has few kind words for it and, if I understand correctly, would hold it responsible for much of what he finds wrong with modern society. Voltaire and Rousseau are not his heroes, to put it mildly, and what he says about them echoes at a distance of close to two centuries the slogan chanted by the nineteenth-century critics of the French Revolution, "C'est la faute à Voltaire, c'est la faute à Rousseau."

DISMISSING THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Indeed, in his opinion, none of the *philosophes* deserves to be regarded as a first-rate thinker and hence as a formidable intellectual adversary. True, they were all high on freedom but their notion of it was naive and ambiguous (4). They had enough sense to distinguish between freedom and license, but since the distinction is a purely subjective one—license is what the positive law defines as license—there is no practical guidance to be derived from it. Nor were they sufficiently aware of the difference between negative freedom, which gives you the right to do something, and positive freedom, which gives you the power to do it. Voltaire, the very embodiment of the spirit of the age, was "a great prose-writer, business man, wit and publicist" (3), nothing more (although most of us, I suspect, would gladly settle for the little that he did have). His attack on Leibniz was clever but dishonest, and his argument for the existence of God —the clock presupposes a clockmaker—begs the question insofar as it takes it for granted that the universe can be studied on the model of an artifact.

Rousseau, though both more "profound" and more "candid," does not fare much better. He is habitually vague and often inconsistent. His notion of a social contract is "scarcely intelligible" since civil society is already needed to enforce the principle that contracts are to be honored—*pacta sunt servanda* (10); his statement that "man is born free" is equally gratuitous, for at birth some human beings are free and others slaves; and his dictum that "obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves is liberty" is a piece of "nonsense" since what it strives to combine are two mutually exclusive notions, obedience and liberty.

Clearly, our speaker is more impressed by the misery of the Enlightenment than by its grandeur. This may explain why, instead of coming to grips with it on its own terms, he is prone to dismiss it out of hand. Since, as a conservative among conservatives, I have my own reservations about the Enlightenment, I find myself in considerable sympathy with many of his remarks. My fear, however, is that, by refusing to take the Enlightenment philosophers more seriously, he has left himself open to the subtle pressures their thought continues to exert on us. These philosophers did after all create the horizon of common sense—the *primum quoad nos*, as it were—from which any discussion of fundamental issues would henceforth begin. The feat was not a mean one. In retrospect, one wonders how it could have been pulled off by a group of people as shallow and simpleminded as in this instance they are made out to be. In any event, transcending that horizon or breaking with that world is not an easy task if only because, as products of the same world, our reflexes are consciously or unconsciously shaped by it. To take a simple example, how many of us are prepared to repudiate the doctrine of universal prepolitical rights, perhaps the most famous of all Enlightenment contributions to our way of thinking, a doctrine on which our own country was founded and which remains at the heart of the most heated public debates of our time, such as the ones pertaining to abortion or the rights of minorities?

Part of the difficulty arises from the fact that Professor van den Haag does not tell us, or tell us clearly enough, what he means by "Enlightenment." The term, as we know, is commonly applied to the leading thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, who believed in the possibility of a perfectly rational society thanks to popular enlightenment or the ever wider diffusion of science and scientific knowledge.

Gone forever, or so it was supposed, were the tension and at times the all-out hostility that had marked the relations between science and civil society since the days of Socrates. The traditional enemies had at long last been reconciled. Their ends could be reformulated in such a way as to coincide on every point. As a result, human beings would no longer be forced to spend their lives in the penumbra of the Platonic cave. They could all become rational members of a society that was itself based entirely on reason. Since all truths were by nature salutary, their unrestricted propagation boded only good for the human race. Not only in the interest of science but in its own interest, society owed it to itself to guarantee freedom of thought, speech, and religion. Such is the precise sense in which most of us are accustomed to thinking of the Enlightenment.

Professor van den Haag appears to be employing the term in a somewhat broader sense, as if it were synonymous with practically all of mode thought from seventeenth-century rationalism to Hegelian idealism and beyond. The new usage, while not wholly unjustified, has the disadvantage of treating as bedfellows thinkers who stand at vastly different places on, if not at opposite ends of, the ideological spectrum. A case in point is Rousseau, who is dealt with as a typical Enlightenment figure. No one denies that Rousseau has a lot in common with Voltaire and the Encyclopedists, but this does not alter the fact that he is remembered above all for his blind-side tackle on the Enlightenment, for his praise of ignorance in the midst of a society that prized science above all else. The matter is of some consequence at least as far as intellectual clarity is concerned, inasmuch as Professor van den Haag's criticism of the Enlightenment was already anticipated by Rousseau, Kant, and the German Idealists. Three examples will illustrate the point.

LIBERTY AND EQUALITY

Professor van den Haag's paper lays a good deal of stress on the tension between liberty and equality, the two great rational dogmas of the modern period. This tension is revealed by the fact that coercive and even draconian measures are most often required to secure and maintain social equality. Van den Haag notes rightly that the citadel of inequality is not so much social convention or the political arrangements under which human beings live but nature itself, which is Calvinistic in the extreme when it comes to such matters; some people are manifestly stronger, more athletic, shrewder, more intelligent, more talented, or more beautiful than others. (In parentheses, I especially liked the parallel between Professor van den Haag and Madonna, a parallel almost as striking as the one Socrates draws between himself and the young and dashing Achilles in the *Apology of Socrates*.) Interestingly enough, the problem had not escaped the notice of Rousseau, who had already dwelt on it at great length. As he saw it, the trouble with the Enlightenment is that, precisely by favoring the development of intellectual and artistic talents, it accentuates the natural differences between human beings. In this it fails to live up to its own democratic and egalitarian principles. To all intents and purposes, Professor van den Haag's argument is identical to the specific thesis of Rousseau's *First Discourse*. Pace Dewey, the rule or method of intelligence is not the rule or method of democracy.

THE STATE OF NATURE AND THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

Much the same could be said about the remarks to the effect that Rousseau's state of nature never existed or that the society described in the *Social Contract* is not a perfectly free society. Professor van den Haag has learned his lesson well, but here again he learned it or could have learned it from Rousseau and his followers. Rousseau would not have wrestled as long and hard as he did with the historicity of the state of nature and the "stupid animal" who supposedly lived in it if he had not been aware of its problematic character. Nor would he have bothered to call our attention to this fact by means of the elaborate footnoting scheme that one finds at the end of the *Second Discourse.* As for the society outlined in the *Social Contract*, Rousseau had no illusions about its true character. In his eyes, it was still a form of slavery, representing at best an approximation of the freedom that prevailed in the state of nature rather than a genuine return to it. The equality guaranteed by the contract on which it rested was, as he himself admitted, a "speculative fancy." Kant and his disciples, Cassirer among them, are the ones who misled us into thinking that Rousseau had found a harmonious solution to the problem of civil society. Yes, freedom and obedience are in some sense mutually exclusive. Still, is it really absurd to think that the person who is not bound by any law in the making of which he has not had a hand is freer than the one who has no choice but to live under laws made only by others?

HUMAN FREEDOM AND SCIENTIFIC DETERMINISM

Professor van den Haag puts his finger on another crucial issue when he argues that, by espousing freedom on the one hand and a wholly deterministic conception of nature on the other, the Enlightenment impaled itself on the horns of an insoluble dilemma. But this too is a problem to which much of the

philosophic literature of the modern period is devoted and which lies at the heart of the efforts undertaken by Spinoza, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, and others to restore some human meaning to life in the midst of a "disenchanted and desolated" world. Admittedly, the solutions with which they came up are less than adequate, or so it would seem in the light of the crisis to which they were to give rise, the one so eloquently described by the poets cited toward the end of Professor van den Haag's paper. Most people finally agreed that the project launched by the Enlightenment philosophers had failed. Professor van den Haag certainly thinks it did, and so do I. The difference between us is that I tend to give these philosophers more credit for trying.

It may well be that, by an inner logic that was bound to work itself out as time went on, the Enlightenment principles lead to the kind of nihilism that so many people have been decrying of late. Thus, the moment may have come to break the spell that they continue to cast upon us. To say this is trivial, however, unless one has some viable alternative or alternatives to it. Unless I am mistaken, Professor van den Haag is not disposed to advocate a simple return to a pre-Enlightenment or premodern position, that is, to the teleological understanding of nature in which the "values" that we have lost were once said to be grounded. It is significant that nature is not mentioned very often or very favorably in the paper. For example, on page twenty-nine the question is asked, "Why follow our nature? How, without God, does nature acquire authority that tells us to follow it?" To this is added the remark that "the argument from nature is empirically wrong." We are likewise told, as I mentioned above, that "the notion of a contract presumes a society already existing and following a *pacta sunt servanda* rule" (13). Is such a rule *merely* a matter of positive law or is there not something in nature that inclines us to honor our promises under all normal circumstances?

RELIGION AS THE SOLUTION

As nearly as I can make out, the solution toward which Professor van den Haag leans consists in a return, not to reason, which is too "weak" and ineffectual (cf. 19), but to religion and specifically to biblical religion. It is no accident that by far the longest section of his paper—close to half of it—is entitled "Religion." Revealed religion may be dangerous insofar as it often breeds fanaticism, but only it can anchor our now "free-floating values." Only it can provide adequate support for freedom and morality. Only it can give meaning to an otherwise indifferent nature. Only it can provide a "transcendent *raison-d'etre* for human life and purpose" (20).

As is made abundantly clear, the religion in question has virtually nothing to do with what goes under that name at the present moment, namely, an amorphous blend of moralizing Pelagianism, Enlightenment deism, and Rousseauean sentimentality. God is not dead. After decades of virtual oblivion, He is out of the closet to which He had been confined. But for all that, He remains largely marginalized. The God of traditional Christianity was infinitely more powerful and more consistent. Fine, but this is where my quarrel with Professor van den Haag lies.

Everyone admits that there is strong support to be found for morality in religion and more particularly in the monotheistic religions. This is how I understand the famous statement from Washington's *Farewell Address*, to the effect that we must only "with [great] caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion." Professor van den Haag seems to be saying more than that. His point, at least as it comes across to me, is that morality and freedom have no real grounding in reason and nature and hence that the only compelling argument to be made for them is the one that proceeds on the basis of faith. "Moral truths," he says, "may well be more than opinions. They may be quite objective. But no one, so far, has discerned a convincing way of demonstrating them" or, I might add, showed them to be self-evident.

If such is the case, one would appear to be forced into a kind of fideism similar to the one that developed in the course of the nineteenth century, in reaction precisely to the excesses of Enlightenment rationalism. This impression is reinforced by the two references to the *mysterium fidei* with which the paper ends (27 and 30). The tradition attacked by the Enlightenment had sought and by and large managed to achieve a remarkable balance between faith and reason, the two great guides to life with which we humans have been provided. Professor van den Haag seems to have given up on that balance—an indication perhaps that, for all his opposition to the Enlightenment, he is still very much influenced by it. This may be just my teen-age Thomism showing up again, but I remain a bit uneasy with a rational argument that does not hold reason in higher esteem. As Mephistopheles says to Faust, "Do but disparage reason and I have you in my clutch." This, for me at any rate, is the crux of the matter and the source of whatever disagreement I may have with Professor van den Haag's presentation.

NOTES

1 Editor's Note: The following response to Ernest van den Haag's lecture was given at a conference entitled "The Ambiguous Legacy of the Enlightenment," sponsored by the Claremont Institute in January 1990. A (revised?) version of van den Haag's presentation was published in *The Ambiguous Legacy of the Enlightenment*, eds. W. Rusher and K. Masugi (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1995) and *The World and I Online* (July 1991), http://www.worldandi.com/sialreport/1991/july/Sa19260.htm.

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RELIGION AND THE AMERICAN REGIME

Our national anthem, "The Star Spangled Banner," speaks of America as "the land of the free and the home of the brave."[1] The attempt to combine these two elements, freedom on the one hand, and courage or, more generally, moral virtue on the other, defines the American way of life at its best and reveals both its greatness and its limitations.

America not only encourages the *practice* of freedom, it was founded on the *principle* of freedom, above all the principle of religious freedom. It is the first nation to have secularized its political life by institutionalizing the separation of Church and State. It was for a long time and perhaps still is the only country in the world of which one can become a full-fledged citizen simply by loving it. From the beginning, it showed itself remarkably accommodating to all forms of religious life and provided a home within its boundaries for the most diverse religious groups.

In many ways, the experiment has proved extraordinarily successful. The Catholic Church has certainly benefited from it. From a small and often suspect minority, it has become a major force on the American scene. Catholics occupy some of the highest positions in all walks of life: government, industry, the military, and the professions. They now form the single largest religious body in the country, as well as one of the wealthiest.

Yet history has demonstrated that the privatization of religion via its subordination to an independent standard of political unity is not an unqualified blessing. Liberal democracy may discourage intolerance and religious strife, but by the same token it is not particularly favorable to an intense spiritual life or to outbursts of religious fervor. Its soil offers scant nourishment for those rare passions that rend the souls of mystics and disclose the heights and depths of authentic religious experience. America, Tocqueville declared wistfully, has not produced any Pascals. The observation remains unchallenged. In the century and a half that has elapsed since it was made, not much has happened that would cause us to doubt its validity. Our European forebears built cathedrals; their American descendants are more famous for building hospitals and taking care of our bodily needs.

Nor does the logic of the system conduce to a significantly high level of public morality. A regime that is more intent on leveling than on raising will not readily allow the goals of freedom and equality to be overshadowed by the pursuit of those civic virtues which the Founders did not deem any less essential to our national well-being and in the development of which they foresaw a major role for the country's different churches. The Fathers of our nation had no intention of removing religion from public life. Their only desire was to put an end to the bloody wars that had marred the relations between religious groups in Europe by disestablishing religion or separating *Church* and *State*. What we have since witnessed is a sustained and largely successful effort on the part of liberal forces to separate *religion* and *society*. Father Richard John Neuhaus, a leading analyst of the contemporary religious scene and a recent convert to Roman Catholicism (from Lutheranism), has spoken in this connection of the "naked public square," borrowing the expression from Shakespeare, who, needless to say, was not talking about secularization. The signs of the sacred are gradually disappearing from our midst, and our cities continue to take on an ever more secular aspect. Even Catholic institutions are not immune to the trend. One simple example, which may seem insignificant but is nevertheless indicative of that trend: at one time, there were crosses on the walls of virtually every classroom in our Catholic institutions. When I came to Boston College twenty years ago, the crosses had been removed but one could still see their outlines at the unfaded spots they had once occupied. Since then, the walls have been repainted and all such traces have disappeared.

By and large, Americans continue to think of themselves as religious, more so perhaps than ever. According to an extensive survey recently carried out by the Graduate School of the City University of New York, 92.5% of Americans claim a religious affiliation and 86.4% identify themselves as Christians. A mere

7.5% profess no religion at all. While these statistics may sound encouraging, they do not tell the whole story. They reveal very little about the quality and the vitality of American religion. Tocqueville, to refer to him once again, thought that as a result of the separation of Church and State, religion would be "longer lasting" but "weaker." That may indeed be the case. One is reminded of the story about the Episcopalian who preferred his church to all others because it did not interfere with either his politics or his religion. The phenomenon appears to be spreading to other religious groups as well. The religion of which Americans are so fond is not necessarily a religion that makes very stringent demands on them. It is in many cases a religion that has gone soft and lost sight of its transcendent goal. This is what has caused a prominent sociologist, Robert Nisbet, to lament the "decline of transcendental Christianity and its replacement by ever softer religions and ever harder systems of social metaphysics."[2]

The signs of trouble have been on the horizon for quite some time. One has only to think of the rising divorce and abortion rate among Catholics, the general permissiveness in the area of sexual morality, the crisis of Catholic education, the fall-off in vocations to the priesthood and the religious life, the creeping materialism of so much of modern life, and the like. Since my colleagues have already said a good deal about these disquieting issues, there is no need for me to dwell on them. My own personal regret is that, despite the potential resources at its disposal, the Catholic Church in America has yet to distinguish itself in the area of higher education and sponsor at least one university that is as good as America's best secular universities. If that is too much to ask for, it could try to establish a center where theological studies would be pursued on the highest level and where young students could be equipped for the manifold challenges that the modern world poses to religious faith.

I began by calling attention to the two major forces at work in the American regime, freedom and the dedication to virtue or the common good. The problem has always been to show how these two forces, which tend to move in opposite directions, can be made to cooperate with and support each other. Freedom leads of itself to individualism, and the dedication to the good presupposes that one is willing to sacrifice one's personal good for the good of the whole. Robert Bellah and his associates put their finger on the problem in the book to which other members of this panel have referred more than once, *Habits of the Heart*, which is appropriately subtitled, *Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Our meeting had as its purpose to examine the challenges that the Catholic Church faces in this country at the present moment. At the deepest level, the challenge has to do with the way in which these two antithetical components of American life can be reconciled and what role the Catholic Church might be able to play in bringing about this reconciliation.

NOTES

1 Editor's Note: I have been unable to ascertain the panel during which "Religion and the American Regime" was given. Presumably it was at a conference of the American Political Science Association, which Fortin frequently attended.

2 Robert Nisbet, "Infidelity's Kingdom," *New York Times*, 28 April 1985, BR17 (a review of James Turner's *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* [Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985]).

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COMMENT ON HUGHES REGARDING THE STRAUSS-VOEGELIN CORRESPONDENCE

Professor Hughes's thoughtful statement brings into ever sharper focus a number of crucial points on which Strauss and Voegelin failed to reach agreement in the course of their long if somewhat intermittent correspondence.[1] Like Strauss, we are told, Voegelin advocated a return to Greek philosophy as an antidote to the spiritual pathologies of the modern era. Unlike Strauss, however, he denied that the ancient philosophers and their medieval followers had achieved an adequate grasp of the fundamental human problems. Hence the need to complement their insights with those of modern philosophy. Voegelin, who knows both premodern and modern thought well, is in the enviable position of being able to remedy the situation by using each side to supply what is missing in the other. His having understood the greatest thinkers of the past better than they understood themselves makes him wiser than all of them, or so it would seem. It is as if a new peak in the evolution of human thought had been attained.

Specifically, what the premoderns lacked according to Voegelin is a fully articulated notion of human consciousness of the kind that emerged in the wake of the "turn to the subject" at the dawn of the modern period. Although well aware of the distortions to which this notion was subjected from Descartes to Husserl, Voegelin looked upon its elaboration as a permanent advance over all earlier thought. A "detailed theory of human consciousness" will henceforth be the beginning of wisdom. The other great Voegelinian themes mentioned by Prof. Hughes—the fundamental human "experiences" and their symbolic expression in words (e.g., "faith" and "reason"), texts, and doctrines; mystical experience as the matrix of the philosophic enterprise; the perfect reconcilability, if not the actual identity, of reason and revelation—are not only related to this breakthrough but necessitated and informed by it.

Strauss, needless to say, was less sanguine about the possibilities of modern epistemological or cognitive theory. It was his conviction that any such theory will always be less illuminating than the knowing experience itself. For Strauss, philosophy begins in a simpler way with the awareness of one's ignorance that is apt to arise when one is confronted with conflicting opinions about some important matter. It is best defined, not as a "search for meaning," as Hughes has it, but as something else, namely, the search for the "truth." Any statement that is not self-contradictory has meaning insofar as the mind can grasp what is intended by it. What we most need to know, however, is whether in addition to being meaningful the statement in question is *true*. Granted, the Ancients knew far less than we do about the world in which we live (e.g., about the structure of the universe, the composition of matter, molecular biology, and the like). Still, this does not rule out the possibility of their having found the right "approach" to the study of nature, including human nature, and hence of their being superior to us in the decisive respect, i.e., in regard to wisdom.

None of this is to imply that Strauss had no use whatever for the Moderns. His questions was not whether we have anything at all to learn from them but *what* we can profitably learn from them apart from the innumerable scientific and technological discoveries by which our lives are being materially enhanced on an almost daily basis. As my opening remarks suggested, Strauss's answer to that question is somewhat different from Voegelin's. Laying it out in detail would require more than a brief note, but if a short cut be permitted, this much can be said. By their fierce opposition to the Ancients, the Moderns enable us—indeed, force us—not only to rethink the classical position but to rethink it in the light of the radical challenge posed to it by the modern philosophic and scientific development as a whole. When asked one day by someone familiar with his searing critique of modernity whether he would have preferred to live at some earlier moment in history, Strauss is said to have replied with a resounding "No" because he would then have been deprived of the opportunity to read Nietzsche, the modern writer who single-handedly brought a mummified Socrates back to life and thereby supplied us with the tools needed to deal on the

highest intellectual plane with what both Strauss and Voegelin regarded as the most important as well as the most urgent problems of our age.

With Strauss as with Voegelin, nothing is ever as simple as it appears to be. This, I gather, is why the debate goes on, as unfinishable as the quest for the truth itself.

NOTES

1 Editor's Note: The following comment was in response to the "Reflections by Hughes" (*Review of Politics* 56:2 [Spring 1994], 345-52) regarding the correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin. Fortin's reply appeared on pages 352-54. For Fortin's first set of comments on the correspondence, see "Straussian Reflections on the Voegelin-Strauss Correspondence" (*CE* 2: 329-36).

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ARISTOTLE AND THE SOCIOBIOLOGISTS: AN OLD CONTROVERSY REVIVED

Being neither a biologist nor an expert on biopolitics, it is with considerable reluctance that I venture into the vast and intimidating domain mapped out in Arnhart's learned article.[1] My own knowledge of the field is limited to what an interested observer is likely to have absorbed, admittedly in more or less random fashion, by reading the popular journals and engaging in occasional debate with scientists, some of them sociobiologists. Here as elsewhere, one cannot help being struck by the enormous difficulties that the growth of scientific specialization and the revelation of hitherto unsuspected links between disciplines once thought to be relatively independent of each other have created, not only for the amateur but for scientists themselves. It says something about our present situation that many of the terms employed as a matter of course by Arnhart and others—sociobiology, bioethics, biopolitics, biomedics, and the like—are not to be found in any dictionary that is more than ten or fifteen years old.

If these new labels suggest anything, it is that the most spectacular developments are the ones that have occurred in the realm of molecular biology, all or most of which could have a direct impact on our individual and collective lives. Being told about the existence of quasars and black holes is one thing; learning that science now has or will soon have the capacity to alter our genetic structure and produce human beings with, say, prehensile tails is quite a different matter. It is also the case that biology has more in common with Aristotelian science than does any other modern science. I have never met a practicing physicist who thinks Aristotle has anything of importance to teach us in the realm of physics, whereas there are at least a few biologists who continue to show a lively interest in his work. The reason, I surmise, is that biology, where nature's purposes are very much in evidence, cannot dispense as easily as does mathematical physics with the notion of finality, the keystone of Aristotle's philosophy of nature. This alone would justify Arnhart's attempt to reexamine the work of present-day sociobiologists in the light of principles derived from that venerable source.

Since Arnhart is not himself a professional biologist, his assessment of contemporary biological theory must of necessity be based either on common principles, i.e., principles that apply to a variety of sciences (those of logic and metaphysics, for example), or on a knowledge of the proper principles and method of biology itself, as distinguished from a thorough knowledge of all that is discussed in that science. Strange as it may sound, one need not be an expert in order to criticize the opinions of experts on any given subject. It suffices that one possess what Aristotle calls *paideia*, a *habitus* that falls short of *epistēmē* or "science" but by virtue of which one is nonetheless able to determine that the conclusions reached by the expert (from whom we may still have a great deal to learn) do not follow of necessity from the premises, or violate the expert's own principles, or are contradicted by more reliable evidence drawn from other quarters. A simple example will illustrate the point. It is not rare for Darwinian biologists to deny that "animate" and "inanimate" beings are essentially different. Yet the fact that they cannot help using these terms, one of them a simple negation of the other, which it therefore presupposes, is already an indication that the distinction between them retains its meaning even for them. I may not always be in a position to tell whether the minute object under my microscope is a living organism or not, but this is hardly enough to call the validity of the distinction into question in cases where no such doubt exists. Everybody knows from common experience that there is more than a difference of degree between a horse and a stone or between a live horse and a dead one. To deny it would be to entangle oneself in a heap of logical inconsistencies such as the ones pointed out in Arnhart's article. Old King Lear knew whereof he spoke when, grieving over the body of his beloved Cordelia, he says: "She's gone forever. I know when one is dead; She's dead as earth." Since I basically agree with Arnhart's analysis (though not necessarily with all of his specific formulations), I shall confine myself to a few cursory remarks about the points on which, as I see it, the argument could be supplemented, refined, or brought into sharper focus.

First of all, since the bulk of the debate turns on the issue of teleology, a more concerted effort might have been made to present in its own terms Aristotle's case for the existence of finality in nature. Granted, Aristotle takes the principle that nature acts for an end or does nothing in vain to be self-evident in the sense that its truth is not established by a process of inference from known premises. This is as much as to say that one cannot give a fully intelligible account of nature without taking its purposefulness into consideration. Anyone who fails to do so indicates by this fact that he or she speaks about nature with as much authority as a blind person might speak about colors (cf. Aristotle, *Physics* 193a7). To call a principle self-evident, however, is not to imply that it is equally accessible to everybody and needs no further explanation. Indeed, ascertaining its exact meaning can be a fairly arduous task, as anybody who has ever wrestled with Book II of the *Physics* knows only too well. If anything, the final cause is the least obvious and hence most easily misunderstood of the four causes in the light of which the natural philosopher conducts investigations. Extreme care must thus be taken, lest, by oversimplifying matters, one should leave oneself open to valid criticism.

We know that nature works for an end, not because it always succeeds, but because it sometimes fails. The occasional birth of a blind child is what tells us that nature intends to produce children with eyes that enable them to see. If the outcome of this or any other natural process were invariably the same, it could be attributed to the necessity of matter and there would be no need to look for any other explanatory cause (cf. *Physics* 198b17ff). Furthermore, it is not hard to figure out why, in the case just mentioned, one particular result rather than its opposite is intended. We have only to look at the handicap under which blind people labor in order to convince ourselves that blindness is not a desirable state. Nor can it be objected that nature is irrational on the ground that it is wasteful in the extreme, producing millions of sperms, for example, when only one is needed to fertilize the female egg. For this apparent wastefulness could be part of a larger pattern designed to insure that the overall end will be attained even under the harshest of conditions. Hunters who use a shotgun instead of a rifle to bag an elusive quarry are not doing anything irrational. They know (and hope!) that most of the pellets will miss the mark; but it is still their intention that at least one of them should hit it.

This said, one has to admit that nature is and will always be in large part mysterious, raising all sorts of questions that remind us of the ones with which the proverbial brat is forever embarrassing his or her parents. There are innumerable instances in which, as Arnhart points out, its purpose remains hidden or can only be discovered with great difficulty and there are likewise instances in which it exhibits no purpose at all. This much we know from the fact that nature is capable of all kinds of blunders, that it occasionally produces monsters, or that part of what it accomplishes is attributable to chance rather than to a determinate cause (cf. *Physics* 199a33ff). The key issue in this regard, and the one about which more information would have been welcome, is that of the fixity of the species. Aristotle was obviously of the opinion that all natural species were eternal and thus never considered the possibility that one might have evolved out of the other. Still, there is no reason to believe that his hylomorphic theory is totally incompatible with some form of evolution, as long as one allows for the influence of equivocal or extraterrestrial causes. If matter is intrinsically ordered to the form and perpetually strives in its own obscure way toward it (*Physics* 192a16ff), the emergence of accidental or aberrant species becomes at least conceivable. True enough, the fact of evolution has yet to be established. Darwin, whose *Origin of Species* went through no fewer than seven different editions, certainly did not establish it, and a hundred years after his death the geological record remains extremely spotty, despite all the efforts that have been made to fill the gaps in it. On the other hand, there is ample evidence to suggest that some species have disappeared. If so, Aristotle himself would have to grant that they are not eternal and hence must have been generated; for, on his own telling, it is only in eternal things that being and possibility coincide. Nor must we think that all of the individual species are necessary to the intelligibility and perfection of the material universe, which requires only that it contain within itself a species capable of reason, along with whatever may be needed to guarantee the survival and well-being of such a species. Some refinement of Aristotle's stated position on this matter thus appears to be called for on the basis of his own principles and in the light of the factual information to which we now have access.

A further question arises in connection with Arnhart's endeavor to point out the inherent weaknesses of the theory of evolution as understood by Darwin and his followers. My fear is that his argument, convincing as it may be to anyone who accepts his premises, will not carry much weight with scientists trained exclusively in the methods of modern natural science. It does little good, for instance, to appeal to what Arnhart (not Aristotle) calls common sense if one's interlocutor harbors a deep distrust of all so-called "common sense" notions. What is needed is a fuller account of Aristotle's general method of procedure as outlined in the *Physics* and the treatise *On the Soul*, rather than as described in the treatises on the *Parts of*

Animals and the *History of Animals*, on which Arnhart relies extensively (with good reason). Such an account would have to explain why, for Aristotle, science must proceed from the general to the particular, in what sense its goal is to achieve an ever more precise knowledge of the various species and their properties, and how the confused but determinate knowledge with which the scientist begins grows more distinct, but less certain, as one comes closer to nature in its concreteness.

Considerations of this sort could at the same time help lay to rest the fanciful but persistent notion that Aristotle's natural science is vitiated by a crude anthropomorphic fallacy which ascribes to the whole of nature certain phenomena proper to the behavior of human beings. There is no denying that Aristotle's argument in favor of teleology rests on an analogy between nature and art, but this hardly warrants the charge that Aristotle was guilty of the pananimism or panorganicism with which he is reproached by his adversaries. To be sure, the fact that I would never inquire into nature's purposiveness were I not the kind of being who acts for a purpose does not prove that all of nature acts for an end, but neither does it prove the opposite. It suggests no more than that the operations of a nature which is intelligible and shares at least extrinsically in reason must of necessity bear some affinity with those of the human mind. Modern scientists, who, by resorting to clever hypotheses, fancy experiments, complex instruments, and symbolic constructions of the most sophisticated kind, put so much of themselves into their enterprises, are the ones who lapse into anthropomorphism when they claim to have given us a perfect image of nature. In point of fact, natural beings, into whose definition matter necessarily enters, defy any and all attempts to arrive at a complete knowledge of them. Studying them in minute detail is like building a bridge across a river, the opposite bank of which constantly recedes as one draws nearer to it. One ends up by being much better informed about nature than would otherwise be possible (the bomb did explode!), but without being able to say what the ultimate composition of matter is. Only the most naive of scientists thinks that what his or her conceptual tools grasp is the natural object as it exists in itself. Biologists may know more about carrots than anyone else, but eating a carrot as they define it, if that were possible, would most likely result in a terrible indigestion.

My final point concerns Arnhart's remarks to the effect that Aristotle's ethics and politics are grounded in a theoretical understanding of nature. These remarks may come as something of a surprise in view of the fact that, in the *Ethics* and the *Politics*, theoretical considerations are kept to a bare minimum. The most plausible explanation is that both works were meant to be read by nonphilosophers, for whom such considerations would be of little use. The problem is far from simple, however, if only because questions pertaining to morality have a certain *prima facie* evidence that questions of a cosmological nature frequently lack. One is reminded in this connection of the famous "Socratic turn," i.e., the turn away from nature and toward human things, which was provoked by Socrates' inability to come to any definite conclusion regarding the competing accounts of the cosmos with which he was confronted (cf. Xenophon, *Mem.* I.1, 10-15). Aristotle was apparently more optimistic about the possibility of a theoretical understanding of nature, but a closer reading of his natural works reveals that he was not unaware of the elusive character of the whole with which the natural philosopher is concerned. I leave it to others to decide whether and to what extent this could affect our understanding of the relationship between the speculative order and the practical order.

Arnhart's article begins and ends with a timely reminder that, by depriving us of all objective standards of moral goodness, modern science risks plunging us into a kind of Nietzschean nihilism. The warning, a fashionable one nowadays, reflects the new mood among critics of the contemporary intellectual scene. There was a time, not too long ago, when Marxism was thought to be the gravest threat to our way of life. Americans knew nothing of Nietzsche and were wholly unattuned to his brooding meditations on the theme of nihilism, with which continental Europeans became obsessed in the aftermath of World War I. Scientific rationalism and democratic freedom were the dominant forces in our society, and it was assumed that, far from pulling us in opposite directions, they supported each other. That situation appears to have changed dramatically in recent years. All signs now point to the fact that the alliance between them is coming apart and that, unless the trend is reversed, we too may soon find ourselves awash in a sea of relativism.

Faced with this alarming prospect, some philosophers have begun to look to classical political thought for the guidance that we need in practical matters. Arnhart's suggestion, if I understand correctly, is that a similar return to the spirit, if not the actual content, of classical natural philosophy may likewise be in order. Unfortunately, the obstacles in this instance are even more formidable, owing to the fact that Aristotelian physics has been all but totally discredited by the triumph of modern science. Any attempt, however feeble, to provide a natural foundation for morality would thus seem to deserve a sympathetic hearing. It is after all remarkable that a number of our leading sociobiologists should suddenly be taking an interest in such outmoded concepts as natural right and natural law—something which, by their own

admission, they would not have done ten years ago. My guess is that they are the ones who are most apt to benefit from Arnhart's thoughtful analysis. I, for one, am grateful for that analysis, which has given me a better idea both of where the problems lie and of how one might come to grips with them.

NOTES

1 Editor's Note: "Aristotle and the Sociobiologists," which originally appeared in *Politics and the Life Sciences* 6:2 (February 1988), 205-8, is one of nine responses by different authors to Larry Arnhart's "Aristotle's Biopolitics: A Defense of Biological Teleology against Biological Nihilism" (ibid., 173-91). The abstract to Arnhart's article is the following: "Modern Darwinian biology seems to promote nihilism, for it seems to teach that there is no rationally discoverable standard in nature for giving meaning to life. The purpose of this article is to argue for a revival of Aristotle's biological teleology as a reasonable alternative to biological nihilism. The article begins with Edward Wilson's vain struggle against nihilism. Then it is argued that a teleological understanding of nature is assumed in the practice of medicine, as illustrated by one case from Oliver Sack's neurological practice. The article then considers the importance of biological teleology for Aristotle's moral and political philosophy, and attention is given to some points of agreement and disagreement with contemporary sociobiologists. The main part of the article is then devoted to a defense of Aristotle's biology against the five objections that might be made by a Darwinian biologist. Finally, the article illustrates the practical implications of this issue for bioethics by considering the recent work of Engelhardt."

VII

SELECTED REVIEWS

Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995, 147 pp.

This engaging book has its origin in the annual Frank M. Covey, Jr., Lectures in Political Analysis that the author was invited to deliver at Loyola University of Chicago in 1995.[1] Every effort seems to have been made to retain the freshness of the oral presentation. Not the least endearing feature of the book is its manifest distaste for the widespread tendency among scholars either to psychoanalyze Augustine or to historicize him. Elshtain makes it plain from the outset that she has little use for Freud's anal science of interpretation. Nor is she hampered in her analyses by scruples stemming from an awareness of the supposedly unbridgeable hermeneutical gulf that separates us from our ancient forbears. She agrees implicitly with the dictum that the past is a foreign country—otherwise why would anyone want to go there?—but not with the historicist view that the borders of that country are impenetrable to us. Her general assumption is that we stand to learn a great deal from Augustine if only we are prepared to take the necessary steps. The book is ample evidence that this is indeed the case.

Elshtain writes not as an Augustinian scholar, something she does not claim to be, nor as a narrow specialist who forsakes the whole in the interest of the part, but as an amateur in the best sense of the word: a "lover" (cf. 117), for whom Augustine has been a traveling companion on an unfinished spiritual journey that began in Wittenberg in her late teens and that "seemed to be heading south, in the general direction of Rome" rather than west in the direction of Paris, i.e., Descartes, or north in the direction of Koningsberg, i.e., Kant (xi). She admits that Augustine is not a dominant figure in the history of political thought (cf. 22). There is even a question as to whether he can be considered a political thinker at all. Nowhere in his works does one find a thematic discussion of the various political regimes and their relative merits, the guiding theme of classical political philosophy. His significance lies elsewhere, in his uncanny ability to probe the recesses of the human heart and uncover the roots of the problems from which political speculation at its highest takes its point of departure. His deepest questions are not "what is politics?" but "why politics?"—not "what is Christianity?" but "why Christianity?" And if he thought it important to raise these questions, it is not because he himself had doubts about either the necessity of politics or the truth of the Christian faith, but because both politics and Christianity were being called into question by others: politics, by his own coreligionists, and Christianity, by the pagan elite of his time.

As examples of the kind of interest that Augustine can hold for the modern reader, Elshtain cites two prominent twentieth-century writers, Hannah Arendt and Albert Camus, both of whom looked to Augustine, the ancient writer who had meditated at length on the fate of empires and civilizations, for an insight into the great existential questions of our own troubled century. Arendt, whose 1918 doctoral dissertation was entitled *Love and Saint Augustine* (eds., J. Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Stark, University of Chicago Press, 1996), once hailed him as the first philosopher of freedom, as well as Rome's first philosopher. (He arrived in the nick of time, just as the Empire was about to go under!) Camus, who was likewise taken up with the problem of evil and its connection with human freedom, devoted a substantial portion of the memoir that he wrote for his Certificate of Advanced Studies to Augustine and made fairly extensive use of him in other writings, such as the lecture that he gave at Columbia University in 1946 and his famous novel, *The Plague*, an allegory of the Nazi occupation of the early 1940s. How much of Augustine Camus had read is another question. A good part of his information, footnotes and all, seems to have been lifted verbatim, albeit anonymously, out of secondary sources, such as Gilson and Tixeront. (See on this point the fine article by Paul Archambault, "Augustin et Camus," *Recherches augustiniennes* 6 [1969], 194-221.)

In order to obtain a fair hearing for Augustine, Elshtain has to challenge the tenacious prejudices of which he has been the victim in our time: his brooding pessimism, his world-denying propensities, his disparagement of the body, his rigorism, his intolerance, his misogyny, his triumphalistic logocentrism or

metanarrativity (cf. 51), and the like. The list is a long one and it is continually being added to by his critics. Were he alive today, it has been said, he would be an antifeminist. Elshtain, who finds the charges "reckless," reads the record differently. Augustine did not despise the world. If anything, he loved it "immoderately," as she says aptly, quoting Peter Brown, his best biographer (61, 89). Not by accident did he spend years of his life arguing against the Manichees, the paradigmatic world-haters of his day. Contrary to popular opinion, he was opposed to forced conversions and cannot in fairness be labeled the father of religious persecution (cf. 45, 98). And he was one of the rare thinkers of his day to uphold the intellectual equality of the sexes (43). On this last issue, Elshtain, who has had a long-standing interest in feminism and knows the movement from within, is well qualified to defend him (cf. 29, 35, 42 et passim). While Augustine would have been critical of that movement as a quest for power, it is unlikely that he would have objected to its demands for justice.

What sometimes comes across to the modern reader as an excessive severity in regard to moral matters is a reflection of Augustine's acute sensitivity to the forces of evil in the world. No one in our tradition has taken more seriously what the Bible calls the "mystery of iniquity." It is to his lasting credit that he was able to establish the fundamental goodness of creation by showing, against the Manichees, that evil was not a substance, an event of considerable import in the history of the Christian tradition. On this score, Elshtain's vigorous support of Hannah Arendt's controversial notion of the "banality of evil" comes as something of a surprise (cf. 74f). Arendt's intention, that of forestalling any attempt to demonize—and thereby glamorize à la Milton, as it were—the Nazi "heroes," was an eminently laudable one, but there was a heavy price to be paid for it; for how can one portray the agents of Hitler's "final solution" as robots mindlessly carrying out the mindless orders of their superiors without at the same time trivializing the greatest crimes of recorded history and absolving their perpetrators of any responsibility for them? Implied in Arendt's position is the view that the last shred of what Augustine understood to be our "inherent" or "natural" sense of decency (cf. 103) can indeed be obliterated from the consciousness, not just of a single human being, but of a large and important group of human beings. If, as Augustine seems to think, the answer to that question is "no," one begins to feel a tension between Elshtain's admiration for the force of Augustine's analysis of evil and her sympathy for Arendt's thesis.

Of particular importance is Elshtain's remarkably clear statement of Augustine's stand on the relationship between Christianity as a universal religion and the political order, which, great or small as it may be, is always particular. Elshtain notes unapologetically that Augustine was not a liberal democrat and could not have been, since liberal democracy had not yet been invented. But neither was he a monarchist or an imperialist. He saw Christianity as a religion that transcends all regimes and is therefore not wedded to any one of them. The thrust of his whole argument is unequivocally against the sacralization of any and all political arrangements. As she rightly points out, for Augustine "there can be no such thing as an earthly sacral society or state" (94). The lesson has not always been heeded—witness the "political Augustinianism" of the Middle Ages—but it was never completely forgotten. Had it not been for Augustine, the West could easily have evolved in the direction of an authoritarianism of the kind that prevailed in the East. Nor is there any solid evidence that Augustine ever changed his mind on this crucial issue. The view, adopted by Elshtain, that he had begun by espousing the imperial theology of Eusebius and his followers is doubtful at best. There are other ways of accounting for the seeming discrepancies between Augustine's various statements on this subject.

One final point, and a small one at that: on page 108, Elshtain refers to "Augustine's grudging endorsement of the lesser evil." While her meaning is clear—Augustine was not a fanatic—the language in which it is expressed may not be entirely appropriate. Augustine occasionally speaks of a "lesser justice" (*iustitia minor*) as an object of choice, but, to my knowledge, never of a lesser evil, small as it may be. The nuance was not unimportant to him. He had not read Machiavelli, did not anticipate him, and would doubtless have rejected him if he had known him.

The book ends, as it had begun, on a personal note, this time with a delightful comparison between Augustine and another one of Elshtain's heroes, Crazy Horse. This is surely a memorable "first" in the long history of Augustinian scholarship.

Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers. Volume I: Faith, Trinity, Incarnation*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1956, 665 pp.

From the outset, Professor Harry A. Wolfson's long-awaited *Philosophy of the Church Fathers* promised to be a major contribution to the rapidly expanding universe of patristic studies.[2] Although the Fathers were primarily "sowers of the divine word," as St. Augustine once called them, it has become fashionable in recent times to study them as philosophers. Yet, except for Ueberweg-Geyer's standard work, *Die patristische und scholastische Philosophie*, now in its thirteenth edition, the first three chapters of Étienne Gilson's more popular *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, and some brief but suggestive pages added, *in extremis*, to Emile Bréhier's *Histoire de la philosophie,* there are few works dealing with the philosophy of the patristic period as a whole.

Before Professor Wolfson went to work, no one had attempted to treat the subject in a topical and exhaustive manner; any effort to fill this lacuna was thus bound to win the applause and gratitude of patristic scholars and historians of philosophy alike. The undertaking was all the more promising since the author is a distinguished and internationally known scholar. Until his retirement in 1958, he occupied the Nathan Littauer Chair of Hebrew Literature and Philosophy at Harvard for many years, and his extensive researches in the field of religious philosophy, which include an earlier work in two volumes on Philo (1947), acquainted him well with much of the intellectual background of the Fathers.

Lest the reader be misled by the title of the book, he should be warned that by "philosophy" Professor Wolfson, unlike most contemporary scholars, does not mean the body of purely rational truths that may be extracted from the works of the Fathers. As the subtitle "Faith, Trinity, Incarnation" suggests, his chief concern is with the great dogmas of Christianity as found in the writings of the early ecclesiastical authors. The way he uses "philosophy" is more akin to the usage by many of the Fathers themselves when they contrasted their own philosophy or wisdom with the philosophy or wisdom of the pagans. It is akin to what the pagan adversaries of St. John Chrysostom meant when they questioned the value of "Christian philosophy" since many lukewarm catechumens postponed their baptism until the approach of death for reasons of self-interest (see *First Homily on the Acts, Patrologia Graeca* 60:23).

More precisely, Professor Wolfson has chosen to deal with the theological formulation of Christian doctrines by means of concepts borrowed from pagan philosophy. His subject, in a word, is the rise of scientific theology during the first centuries of the Church, and as such it is a timely and important one. One may form some idea of the issues involved by pondering the following concrete example. When in his answer to Jesus' question: "But who do you say that I am?" St. Peter replied: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16:15-16), he marveled at the wonder of Jesus; ever since, belief in His divinity and humanity has remained fundamental to all orthodox Christianity. Less than a century later, after the Docetists had questioned the reality of Christ's manhood, St. Ignatius of Antioch professed the same fundamental truth by saying: "There is only one physician, of flesh and of spirit, generate and ingenerate, God in man, true life in death, Son of Mary and Son of God, first passible then impassible, Jesus Christ our Lord" (*Ad Ephes.* 7). More elaborate than Peter's simple confession, this statement brings out clearly some of the implications of the primitive *kerygma*, of the good news of God's love, and represents one of the first attempts at theological inquiry.

Upon closer examination, however, it may be shown that St. Ignatius has hardly done more than bring together, within the compass of a single sentence, a number of ideas scattered throughout the books of the New Testament. His declaration may in turn be compared to the pronouncement of the Council of Chalcedon on the same subject: "In one and the same Christ... must be acknowledged two natures without commingling, without change, without division, inseparable... joined together in one Person and subsistence" (Denziger 148). One senses immediately that the definition of the Council is not a mere

restatement of Scripture but a new formulation of its views on Jesus of Nazareth, which draws extensively upon the technical vocabulary of contemporary philosophy. Whereas St. Ignatius had not used a single nonbiblical expression, none of the words in the lines just quoted occurs in Scripture, and all of them can be traced back to a definite source in Greek philosophy. By its formal precision, the Chalcedonian doctrine could satisfy the requirements of the philosophically trained mind and forestall future heresies. At the same time, there is little doubt, at least in the mind of a Christian, that this doctrine coincides with the teaching of the Gospel concerning the dual nature of Christ.

Professor Wolfson is, of course, well aware of the fact that the Fathers were not of one mind on the status of pagan literature and learning in the Church. Many of the more conservative among them emphatically denounced all philosophers as the "patriarchs of heretics"; they viewed any *rapprochement* between the "wisdom of God" and the "wisdom of the world" as a reckless and perverse attempt to dilute the wine of the Gospel with the water of secular philosophy. There is no denying that the misguided use of philosophy has often led to heresy. Nevertheless, it soon became apparent that the answer to a bad philosophy was not "No philosophy!" but a good one. In his onslaught against the philosophers, even Tertullian, the most outspoken representative of the antiphilosophic tradition, had refurbished and then used the arms of philosophy, thereby intimating that an adjustment between the rival claims of Jerusalem and Athens was possible.

The way in which the reconciliation was effected is examined by Professor Wolfson in the important chapters dealing with Alexandrian allegorism and the single and double faith theories. The metaleptic mode of interpretation, inherited from Philo, led Clement and Origen to discover in the secret and hidden teaching of Scripture the explicit teaching of philosophy itself. Agar, Abraham's Egyptian slave, and the foreign woman mentioned in Proverbs personify philosophy or encyclical culture (read the "liberal arts"), both now joyfully introduced into the fold as captives of Christ; the five barley loaves and the two fishes of the Gospels emerge as the Law of Moses and Greek philosophy, respectively. The author traces this nonliteral exegesis to the midrashic interpretation of the Old Testament employed by the rabbis of Palestinian Judaism and, through Philo, to the allegorical interpretation of the poets practiced by the Greek, especially the Stoic, philosophers. He has unfortunately neglected much of the new material made available since the discovery of the Qumran scrolls, and in general has a tendency to undervalue the originality of Christian hermeneutics. He deserves much credit, however, for reminding us again that in the works of Philo, Origen, and their followers the spiritual sense of Scripture does not entail a rejection of the literal sense. His remarks will be appreciated even more if we recall that Dom Capelle once had to write a scholarly article in order to prove that St. Ambrose did not really mistake Abraham for God the Father.

The central portion of the book examines, at great length, what the author considers the three crucial mysteries of Christianity, namely, the Trinity, the Generation of the Son—which the Fathers were careful not to confuse with the generations of the pagan gods or with the Philonic belief in the creation of the *logos* from nothing—and the Incarnation. The work ends appropriately with a discussion of Gnosticism, defined by Wolfson as "the verbal Christianizing of paganism" (503), and with a rapid survey of various heretical doctrines.

The foregoing remarks hardly suffice to give the reader an inkling of the rich diversity of Professor Wolfson's book. One can only admire the breadth of an undertaking that ranges from the New Testament authors to St. John of Damascus, the last of the Fathers, and that strives to set forth the doctrines of Christians and pagans, of orthodox writers and heretics, without undue simplification and in a language that remains sober and lucid throughout. Origen's remark that nothing "useless or superfluous" is to be found in Sacred Scripture might apply to Wolfson himself. His erudition is staggering yet easy, there are no rhetorical trappings, no "niceties" of style. The formal structure of the book adheres to a uniform pattern: The author begins each section with a statement of his thesis, presented as a working hypothesis, which he proceeds to substantiate by means of numerous texts taken from the works of the Fathers. The results of the inquiry are then summed up neatly in the final paragraphs of each chapter.

Care has been taken to state the position of each author in his own terms. The quotations have been judiciously chosen for their illustrative value and, happily, no effort has been made to provide an exhaustive inventory of references, since such a catalogue would only have cluttered the exposition and obscured the drift of the argument. Nor is Professor Wolfson content with merely relating the contents of the works studied. Adopting what the Preface describes as a "hypothetico-deductive method," he strives to reconstruct each author's thought, to bring out its latent implications, and to derive its significance. This task was all the more formidable since the diverse intellectual currents of the age tend to merge and constitute a kind of philosophic *koinē,* in which the individual components at times tend to lose their identity. As befits an endeavor of this kind, the tone is serene and unimpassioned from beginning to end.

The author is obviously not interested in taking up cudgels against any of his colleagues; throughout his book he has left the spotlight squarely on the Fathers themselves.

Still one suspects that, for all its impeccable methodology, aided by a flair for the relevant which comes only with years of experience, all is not well with the state of Professor Wolfson's scholarship. He himself seems to have anticipated adverse criticism, for he has made a feeble attempt to forestall it in his Preface. Not all readers will agree that when St. Paul speaks of the Trinity he refers to a trinity existing after the Resurrection (see 167), that the idea of the Incarnation, conceived as a supernatural birth, is foreign to the Apostle (see 174), that he equates the pre-existent Christ with the Holy Spirit (see 175), that the difference between the Spirit who proceeds and the Son who is generated is only a verbal one (see 256), or that when Christian theologians call God "Father" in relation to the *Logos,* they imply that "He is its material cause" (293). Because Christian writers speak of the Son as being generated by the Father, Wolfson hastily concludes that the Father enjoys a priority of nature, that there is a distinction of cause and effect between the Persons of the Trinity, and that the Persons differ specifically from one another (see 308-9, 315). His desire to lay bare the inner meaning of certain texts sometimes leads him to read new meanings into them as when, in his account of the relation between the Father and the Son, he substitutes the word "cause" for the word "order," which the Fathers preferred for obvious reasons (see 309, 330, 358).

Just what the author means by the pseudo-Aristotelian "specific genus" mentioned on several occasions in connection with the Trinity (see 322, 325, passim) remains unclear to this reviewer. More sweeping still is his assertion that the work of the Fathers consisted in "recasting... Christian beliefs in the form of a philosophy... thereby producing... a Christian version of Greek philosophy" (vi). He is on more solid ground when he begins to trace the steps by which the Fathers finally arrived at an adequate formulation of the dogma of the Incarnation, even if he has little or nothing to say about the idea that homogenizes most of what they wrote or thought concerning this mystery: God's abiding love for fallen man and His desire to rescue him from the power of the devil, of sin, and of death. According to Professor Wolfson, the union of the two natures in Christ "reduces itself to the use of the analogy of [the] Aristotelian conception of the unity of matter and form" (373; cf. 407). But Aristotle's theory views matter and form as two incomplete substances combining in such a way as to constitute a single nature. As such it is essentially monophysitic, and one fails to see how it could be of much help in the present case. Recent studies have shown that the analogy employed by the Fathers is the Neoplatonic notion of "unconfused union," according to which two complete natures come together to form a single being without undergoing any alteration.[3]

Unfortunately, Professor Wolfson devotes but little attention to Neoplatonism. This constant, almost systematic, neglect of the most important philosophical movement of the later patristic period may be one of the more serious shortcomings of his book. Equally worrisome is the total lack of concern for the form of the works studied. Patristic literature is like a coat of many colors and ranges all the way from popular sermons—intended for simple, not to say illiterate, audiences—to treatises of the highest scientific value. The Church Fathers had understood from the start that they, too, must be all to all men. Just as Jesus had adapted His teaching to His listeners, so they made every effort to be understood by everyone. Truth in the end may be one, but it cannot be presented exactly in the same manner to all men. Indeed, as St. Augustine pointed out, certain truths should be withheld altogether from persons who, either through natural inability or lack of training, are incapable of grasping them properly and stand little chance of deriving any benefit from them. Not only error but truth itself can be harmful. Origen, who was not one to underestimate the power of folly, thought that to speak about God was always fraught with danger. The greater a man's respect for his hearers and for the truth, the more circumspect he will be when called upon to discuss grave issues before the general public.

All this is to say that it would be rash to expose an author's thought without first determining where one should look for it. There is every reason to believe that the Fathers were far more subtle in their approach to the great theological truths than modern scholarship, on the whole, is willing to concede. A genuine appreciation of this fact might shed a flood of light on the would-be contradictions and inconsistencies with which they have often been taxed. Instead of searching their works for implications of which they themselves were unaware, Professor Wolfson could have devoted more time to uncovering the doctrines of which they were fully aware, even if, for prudential reasons, they felt obliged to present them under the subtle disguise of rhetoric. This reader, at any rate, would feel much more secure if he was convinced that the interpretations offered him rested upon a thorough and painstaking analysis of each work, and not merely upon a sampling of quotations wrested from their natural habitat, possibly disfigured or thrown out of focus by this very fact.

What the student who reads the early Christian writers as the first witnesses to a great and living

tradition will resent even more is the merciless dissection to which their works have been subjected. Under Professor Wolfson's microscope, the Fathers, who were men of extraordinary vitality, are shed of all but the last drop of blood. Even such giants as Origen and St. Augustine emerge as skeletons, never to be restored to the unity of breathing life. Of the existential and confrontational aspects of their writings, not even the slightest hint is given. One may object that such aspects do not lie within the scope of the book. Still, given the dynamic quality of patristic literature, it is doubtful that the surgical operation performed by the author is fully justified. If this is the price of scholarship, it is a heavy one indeed. As long as the world of the Fathers continues to be haunted by the ghost of nineteenth-century *Wissenschaft,* it is not likely to arouse much enthusiasm in the heart of the modern reader.

Professor Wolfson knows this only too well, and he has long since resigned himself to it. He is a scholar writing for other scholars whose appreciation he has learned to value more highly than the plaudits of the multitude. His peers will admire his integrity as a researcher and the boldness of his enterprise. But, at times, they may disagree with his method; they may be quick to point out that some of his efforts have miscarried; on a number of unverified hypotheses they are likely to withdraw their vote of confidence; often they may be tempted to insert his most valid remarks into an entirely different framework. In the end, all this may simply be another way of acknowledging their personal debt to him, and of proclaiming the value of his contribution to our knowledge of the intellectual aspects of the early Christian centuries.

Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100—600*). Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971, 417 pp.

The first volume of Professor Pelikan's projected five-volume history of Christian doctrine renews in spectacular fashion a genre that seems to have lost much of its appeal for an increasingly activistic generation of scholars and students.[4] As the general title suggests, the work is not intended as a simple history of *dogma,* i.e., of those doctrines which have been defined and officially proclaimed as truths of faith by the Church; nor does it purport to be a full-scale history of *theology,* i.e., of the thought and private beliefs of individual theologians within the Church. Its precise subject matter is Christian *doctrine,* by which Pelikan means what the Church of Jesus Christ believed, taught, and confessed (cf. Rom. 10:8-10) on the basis of the word of God at various moments in its history—in short, the doctrinal rather than the ethical content of the Church's teaching as expressed in the writings of its leading spokesmen, its credal statements, its exegesis, its apologies, its preaching, its piety, and its liturgical life.

The book opens with an introductory chapter ("Praeparatio Evangelica") which explores the relation of Christianity to Judaism, out of which it arose, and to Greek philosophic thought, with which it eventually came into contact. There follows a discussion of early heterodox or heretical Christian movements (Marcionism, Gnosticism, Montanism), after which Pelikan turns to the major theological developments of the first six centuries in the realms of soteriology, ecclesiology and sacramental doctrine, Trinitarian speculation, Christology, and Christian anthropology. The last chapter is devoted appropriately to a brief account of the attempts to arrive at an orthodox consensus on the part of the authors of late antiquity, both in the West and in the East, who sum up or sift out the work of their predecessors and serve as a direct link between the early Church and the Middle Ages. The discussion avoids the danger of superficiality or randomness by focusing, whenever possible, on specific texts in which the problems at hand may be thought to have achieved their classic expression, or else by concentrating on certain key concepts and using them as pegs on which to hang considerations of a broader nature. A carefully selected and briefly annotated bibliography of some five hundred items in at least six different languages accompanies the text. One should also note the original and highly attractive format, which does away with the usual infantry boots of scholarship by placing the essential references in the wide margins of the page.

Pelikan is a master craftsman, who excels at weaving a plethora of pullulating theological detail into a series of coherent and well-delineated patterns. To the qualities of the writer are joined those of the historian who is aware of the limitations of his discipline, who never confuses vagueness with heresy or an underdeveloped doctrine with a false one, who knows that alternatives are not always clear to those who face them for the first time and that heresy is often a matter of "poor timing" (70), who can draw clean lines of demarcation without sacrificing the penumbra that separates orthodoxy from heterodoxy (122), and who is sensitive to the positive contribution occasionally made by heretics themselves to the settlement of a controverted issue or the hammering out of a victorious doctrine (81).

There are, as might be expected, numerous questions of selection, interpretation, or emphasis that could easily lend themselves to debate. It is surprising, e.g., that Augustine's highly original and influential views hardly receive any mention at all in the thematic discussion of the evolution of Trinitarian doctrine. Over and beyond these points of detail, however, lies the deeper issue of the nature of historical theology, which, as Pelikan understands it, has to satisfy both the demands of scientific objectivity and the rightful claims of orthodox belief and must therefore be attentive to the elements of continuity and permanence as well as of change, novelty, and growth in the transmission of the Christian message. The methodological assumptions underlying the author's position have been set forth in two companion volumes to which the reader is

referred in the bibliography: *Development of Christian Doctrine: Some Prolegomena* (New Haven, 1969) and especially *Historical Theology: Continuity and Change in Christian Doctrine* (New York, 1971).

Broadly speaking, Pelikan's approach may be described as an effort to break out of the dilemma in which historical theology has been caught up since the days of Harnack and Troeltsch, a dilemma perhaps best defined by the two poles of late nineteenth-century thought, positivism and historicism. The evolution of Christian doctrine is viewed, not as a disastrous historical accident or a fatal compromise with contemporary secular thought (Harnack), but rather as a matter of theological necessity, motivated among other factors by a legitimate desire to preserve the integrity of the Catholic teaching from the encroachments of philosophy. Unlike Troeltsch, on the other hand, Pelikan carefully steers clear of the relativism that threatens any attempt to interpret specific Christian teachings in terms of the social and political conditions of the period to which they belong.[5] His own chief concern is with the inner dynamics and logical validity of the doctrines under scrutiny.

The only question in this reviewer's mind is not whether Pelikan is justified in breaking with the tradition of his predecessors, but whether the break is radical enough. Pelikan observes rightly that orthodox theology was characterized throughout the early centuries by the tension between biblical and philosophic doctrine (50), and he records faithfully several remarks made by the Christian writers themselves which suggest that their most explicit teaching did not always correspond to their most profound teaching (cf. 46, 115, 349, et passim). Yet not much attention is paid to the possible conclusions to be drawn from such remarks. There is ample reason to suspect that the Church Fathers not only made the most of the alliance between the Christian faith and pagan philosophy but in many instances deliberately and shrewdly postulated a greater alliance than actually existed (cf. 42). A classic example of that method of procedure is to be found in Basil's *Letter to Young Men on Reading Greek Literature*, a text replete with quotations from the classical authors, virtually all of which have been distorted to suit the requirements of the case.[6]

The same failure to take into account the element of accommodation in the works of the Fathers may be partly responsible for other conspicuous omissions. The first chapter includes an interesting discussion of the closing of the School of Athens by Justinian, which is described with some justification as the act of a coroner rather than of an executioner (41). Not a word is said on the other hand about the School of Alexandria, which managed to avert a similar fate by coming to terms with the ecclesiastical authorities. It is significant that the leader of the school, Ammonius, was never baptized but, by baptizing Aristotle, did something which, directly or indirectly, was to prove far more important for the future development of Christian doctrine in the West. Analogous considerations would apply from a slightly different point of view to such writers as the Pseudo-Dionysius and particularly Boethius, who, as Courcelle has shown, had probably been a student of Ammonius in Alexandria and whose works reflect some of the same general preoccupations.

Whatever else may be said about it, the book as a whole bears out Pelikan's claim that there is more to be learned about what the early Christian believed and taught than was recognized by the older history of dogma. As such, it fully deserves the lively interest with which it has been greeted not only by theologians and Church historians but students of intellectual history as well. The fact that it is the first book by a non-Catholic to have earned the Shea prize awarded by the American Catholic Historical Association bears eloquent witness to the thoroughly ecumenical spirit in which it was written. More than most endeavors of its kind, it is capable of providing a much-needed antidote to what Pelikan himself once described as "the murky subjectivities of a religious solipsism that cannot see beyond the borders of its own century."

H.Y. Jung, *The Crisis of Political Understanding: A Phenomenological Perspective in the Conduct of Political Inquiry*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1979, 283 pp.

Jung's *Crisis* is an ambitious book written from the dogmatic perspective of a firm believer in the redeeming virtue of phenomenology.[7] Like the works of Alfred Schutz and Aron Gurvitsch, on which it often relies, it combines a commitment to phenomenology with a lively interest in social theory. Above all, it claims to be the first treatise systematically to apply the relatively new phenomenological paradigm to the realm of politics (xiv). Its undergirding thesis is that philosophical phenomenology is destined to supersede all previous as well as all currently dominant modes of political discourse. Phenomenology is understood throughout not simply as a method, as it is for example in Heidegger's *Being and Time*, section 7, but in the Husserlian sense of a complete and rigorous science capable of securing universal assent, of synthesizing theory and practice, and of overcoming the numerous dichotomies that have traditionally plagued the house of philosophy (cf. 174).

The essay is divided into four unequal parts dealing respectively with the nature of phenomenological thinking, the primacy of ontology, the phenomenological critique of political knowledge, and, by way of conclusion, the triumph of subjectivity in the conduct of political inquiry. In point of fact, roughly half the book is taken up with an exposition of the main tenets of phenomenological ontology. Due stress is laid on such familiar themes as Husserl's critique of modern science, his discovery of the *Lebenswelt*, which is said to provide a ready-made link with the everyday world of politics, the role of the body in human communication and the general notion of embodiment (against Descartes), the performative character of language, the problem of intersubjectivity, and the historicity of human thought. The second half is in the main a more or less detailed assessment of a number of competing models, labeled specifically behavioralism, cybernetic physicalism, democratic ontology, and ontological objectivism. In each case the treatment focuses on some prominent exponent of the theory at hand: Heinz Eulau, Karl Deutsch and Herbert Simon, C.B. Macpherson, and Leo Strauss. Phenomenologists will welcome this extension of their discipline into an area from which for the most part it has hitherto been conspicuously absent, and open-minded political theorists will appreciate the attempt to liberate the study of politics from the shackles of a narrow and desiccating "methodolatry" that stubbornly refuses to ground epistemology in any kind of ontology.

In spite of its impressive documentation, the book poses a series of problems to which more thought will have to be given before a final verdict regarding the validity of its conclusions can be rendered. For present purposes, only three such problems need be mentioned. The first concerns the nature of the phenomenological approach, which is supposedly free of presuppositions and hence superior to any rival approach to the study of political reality. Following Husserl's lead, Jung rightly points to the need for an historical account of the emergence of modern scientific methodology. The hitch is that he never seriously considers the possibility that phenomenology may have a history of its own, in the light of which it becomes not only more fully intelligible but also less radical than one might think. However much Husserl may have tried to improve upon Descartes, the grandfather of epistemological scientism, he still saw himself (and was seen by Heidegger) as his remote follower (cf. *Cartesian Meditiations*, introduction), sharing with him, among other things, the notion of a presuppositionless science and therewith perhaps some of the essential limitations of Cartesian philosophy.

This brings us to a second difficulty, which is that, although the eminent authorities adduced in support of Jung's position—Husserl, Scheler, Heidegger, Schutz, Gurvitsch, Gadamer, Merleu-Ponty, Ricoeur, and others—are generally made to speak with one voice, they do not present anything like a united front and

are often at odds with one another on basic issues. The problem is not solved but further obfuscated by the dubious Heideggerian interpretation that is offered of the later Husserl. According to all appearances, the nagging questions raised by Heidegger's epoch-making critique of the transcendental reduction, which he viewed as a last remnant of the old Cartesian ideal, have been bypassed altogether. These questions will not go away simply because Jung and others before him have chosen to ignore them. (See, on this subject, H.G. Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 182ff).

Finally, political theorists are likely to find Jung's approach far too abstract to be of much use to them. Granted, the present volume is only intended as a prolegomenon to an eventual phenomenological critique of politics (cf. xv), but it is nevertheless remarkable that it manages to discuss the now well publicized "crisis of political understanding" for over two hundred pages without once adverting to a concrete political issue. In view of that fact, the hasty dismissal of Strauss on the ground that he begins with the roof and never reaches the foundation (and that he is "naive" and "self-contradictory" to boot; cf. esp. 155-60) lends a touch of irony to the discussion and makes us wonder whether an approach as deeply rooted in *Erkenntnistheorie* as the one advocated here will ever be able to do justice to the irreducible complexities of the political life or the intricate relationship between theory and practice. Jung's politically-minded readers will undoubtedly be in a better position to judge the value of his theory once he has demonstrated what can be done with it. To remain with the present, my guess is that most of them will await the projected sequel with a blend of curiosity and apprehension.

Arthur Stephen McGrade, *The Political Thought of William of Ockham: Personal and Institutional Principles*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974, 281 pp.

The present monograph constitutes a valuable addition to the growing body of literature on the political thought of William of Ockham.[8] It is all the more welcome as the spectrum of scholarly opinion regarding the matter at hand is unusually broad and varied. Ockham has been alternately described as a moderate and an extremist, a conservative and a brash innovator, a papalist and a conciliarist, an individualist and a constitutionalist, an Erastian and a theological positivist. Some have even questioned whether he had anything like a coherent political theory or, if he did, whether it bore any relationship to his nominalist principles. Setting his own independent course through these muddied waters, McGrade offers a synthesis of Ockham's thought that does justice to and reconciles all or most of its apparently contradictory strands. The book is divided into two uneven parts, the first of which deals with Ockham's expressly political views, and the second with the elements of his academic philosophy and theology that may be deemed relevant to those views.

The Ockham presented in these pages is not a skeptic or a mere critic of existing institutions but a constructive thinker to whom may be traced some of the most innovative ideas of the time. His overriding concern was with the dignity and freedom of the individual, whose rights he defended among other ways by insisting that no one could be corrected without first being shown his error (cf. 48-63). Although he was not the only theologian of his generation to hold that the head of the Roman Church could lapse into heresy, he was the first to devise a process of doctrinal correction whereby, once convicted, an erring and pertinacious pope could be brought to heel. On the institutional side his attacks were pitched for the most part at the hierocratic conception of society which claimed for the pope the fullness of spiritual as well as temporal power. Yet he never challenged the fundamental assumptions of medieval society. His sole intention was to explore new ways in which the harmonious cooperation of the spiritual and the lay powers could be secured. The position that he advocated in that regard is characterized as a balanced dualism. Others before him (e.g., Thomas Aquinas and John of Paris) had rejected the monism of the curialists, but Ockham went further than all of them in calling for a disengagement of the two powers, a disengagement that he sought to promote by emphasizing the spiritual nature of the Church and simultaneously limiting the sphere of governmental activity to the punishment of wrongdoers.

Although consistent with his nominalism, Ockham's politics cannot be said to be deduced from it. His own proposals for the reorganization of society, both ecclesiastical and lay, were defended on the grounds of practicality rather than of theoretical necessity. This is not to be taken to mean that he was an unrestrained voluntarist or a proponent of reason of state politics. As McGrade rightly points out (189-96), he fully acknowledged the role of reason in human affairs and did not doubt for one moment that moral conduct should be governed by objective principles. One wonders, however, to what extent the argument in this instance goes to the root of the problem. The basic issue is not whether Ockham admitted the existence of nonsubjective norms of morality but whether these norms are ultimately founded on anything other than an act of God's free will. In an effort to preserve the divine omnipotence against the encroachments of philosophical necessitarianism, Ockham reduced the natural law in the strictest sense to a single negative precept prohibiting the hatred of God. He was thereby led to interpret differently the classic question of the dispensability of the precepts of the Decalogue. While in many particulars his theory resembles the older view, the spirit that informs it can hardly be regarded as traditional. Similar reservations may be voiced in regard to the significance attached to Ockham's threefold division of natural right into absolute, nonabsolute ideal, and suppositional. By referring to this so-called suppositional right as "natural," Ockham has invested it with a higher dignity than it might otherwise be thought to possess. Though less conservative than that of the political Augustinians of his age, his position may thus be more conservative than that of Augustine himself.

For want of space McGrade has deliberately avoided lengthy comparisons with other writers. The occasional reference to Marsilius of Padua and Dante, helpful as they may be, betray a lack of awareness of the element of accommodation in the works of both of these authors. In view of the role that he assigns to the "stronger or superior part of the whole citizen body," it is doubtful whether Marsilius can be considered a champion of popular sovereignty (cf. 62, 83, 109, 123, 214, 226). Dante's view on the subject of Christianity and its relation to civil society may likewise be considerably more radical than his own generally respectful statements would seem to suggest (cf. 84, 99, 217). A larger question arises concerning the "political" character of Ockham's writings. That, as a result of his involvement with Ludwig of Bavaria and of his own quarrels with three successive popes, Ockham developed a passionate interest in politics during the last twenty years of his life is undeniable. There is a sense, however, in which even the works of this period may be said to have been somewhat less than political. Ockham's success would undoubtedly have been greater had he been less outspoken and especially less bitterly polemical in the public utterance of certain legitimate but potentially disruptive ideas.

The foregoing strictures are not meant to detract from the merits of a book that abounds in illuminating insights and pointed formulations. McGrade's essay not only provides a competent and remarkably lucid account of the politics of this "most formidably technical of the great scholastics" (23), it can also serve as a fresh point of departure for a study of the impact of political Ockhamism during the century and a half that immediately preceded the break with premodern thought consummated by Machiavelli and his followers.

David Hollenbach, *Justice, Peace and Human Rights: American Catholic Social Ethics in a Pluralistic World*. New York: Crossroad, 1988, 260 pp.

David Hollenbach's new and eminently digestible collection of fourteen essays, all of them originally published as separate articles over a ten-year period, may be recommended as a reliable guide to recent developments in Roman Catholic social thought.[9] The author has imparted a measure of unity to the whole by grouping these essays under the following (abbreviated) headings: Pluralism, Economic Justice, Human Rights, Peace and War, and, lastly, Social Ethics in Pastoral Perspective. Informed readers will welcome the concise yet penetrating account of the debates to which the issues under consideration have given rise within the Church since Vatican II. Others will want to use the book to catch up on what they may have missed.

As the subtitle suggests, Hollenbach is mainly interested in the social teachings of the Catholic Church in this country, a subject on which he can speak with authority since he has had a direct hand in the preparation of some of the bishops' most important and most widely publicized documents. Accordingly, his book comes as close as almost any other book to representing the mainstream of present-day Catholic social ethics, at least as far as the episcopal and theological establishment is concerned. Whether it also represents the thinking of the bulk of the Catholic population is still an open question.

To no one's surprise, Hollenbach writes as both an exponent of and an apologist for the positions advocated by the bishops, although he is not averse to speaking in his own name and occasionally takes a personal stand on some of these matters. At the risk of simplifying things, one can say that, politically, he is slightly to the left of the bishops, who are slightly to the left of Rome, which appears to be slightly left of the vast majority of Catholics. He knows that numerous objections have been raised to the bishops' pastoral letters on nuclear warfare and on the American economy in particular, but he is not inclined to attach much weight to them. Taking these objections more seriously might have lent greater cogency to his own arguments and thereby enhanced the value of the book.

In a few instances, the objections do not appear to have been met head-on. The bishops, we are told, are often accused of being too specific in their recommendations—to which Hollenbach replies, in substance, that specificity is precisely what was needed in order to advance the debate. Fine, except that what critics usually have in mind is not specificity as such but the level of specificity that is appropriate when the discussion bears on contingent means rather than necessary ends. Abortion, for example, is a very specific issue, and it happens to be an issue on which the Catholic tradition speaks with a single voice. Nobody could reasonably blame the bishops, or otherwise fail to understand them, if, instead of fudging that issue as they now appear to be doing with their so-called "consistent ethic of life," they were to take a strong and unequivocal stand against it.

As Hollenbach rightly notes, hardly anyone challenges the bishops' right and duty to speak out in some way on political matters. The real question is whether, given America's political traditions, it is up to a group of bishops who have no natural families of their own, are not accountable to any electorate, and are not known for their expertise in domestic or foreign affairs, to advocate, publicly and by virtue of their office, certain controversial policies that could affect the welfare of the nation and endanger the lives of its citizens. What if the bishops' recommendations concerning disarmament, nuclear deterrence, and the like should backfire and set the stage for some unspeakable disaster? The Fathers of Vatican II were more restrained. They thought that matters such as these, where opinions are bound to differ, are better left to the laity, who are to be given the formation needed to discharge their responsibilities with wisdom and moderation. (See, e.g., *Gaudium et Spes*, 43.)

Another case in point is the bishops' stance on pacifism, which, Hollenbach admits, goes beyond what

Vatican II had to say on this subject. What are the likely consequences of such a stance? As I recall, there were barely more than 130 conscientious objectors on the Catholic side in this country during World War II. With a blessing from the hierarchy, if only a left-handed one, that number is liable to jump substantially in the event of another war. This means only that the burden of defending the country and its citizens (pacifists included) will fall on fewer shoulders. It is true, as Hollenbach says, that the members of the monastic orders, who have traditionally been exempt from military duty, stand before us as perpetual reminders that human beings are called to a life of peace. But it is also true that monks, who have never represented more than a small fraction of the population, are supposed to merit their exemption by assuming burdens that few other people are willing to bear.

There is, in fact, no principled defense to be made of pacifism, and I know of no first rate thinker who ever tried to provide one (unless one considers Bertrand Russell a first-rate thinker). Even Tertullian, the prime witness for the existence of an alleged pacifist tradition in the early Church, was unable to act consistently in accord with its demands. As the American bishops learned (rather bluntly) from Cardinal Casaroli some time after the issuance of the second draft of their pastoral on nuclear warfare, there is only one theory on the basis of which matters pertaining to war are to be adjudicated in the Catholic tradition, namely, the just war theory, which was finally given the right of way in the last draft of the pastoral.

But which version of that theory? For better or for worse, the one that the bishops would endorse appears to be much closer in spirit to Grotius than to, say, Thomas Aquinas (see Hollenbach's summary, 138). The rules have become far more detailed and precise, at the risk of entangling us in a kind of casuistry that makes the old casuistry against which Pascal inveighed look like child's play. My fear is that, if the crunch ever comes, this fragile edifice, bereft of virtually all support in human nature, will come tumbling down like a house of cards.

The parallel letters issued by the French and German episcopal conferences were more realistic. Hollenbach nevertheless judges them inferior to the American letter and faults them in particular for their emphasis on what they refer to (apropos of Michael Walzer) as an "ethic of distress" or an "emergency ethic." The reason, he suggests, is that emergency situations often serve as a pretext to suspend the ordinary rules of moral conduct.

One wonders, however, whether there is not a touch of complacency in this reluctance to take supreme emergencies into account. The authors of the French and German letters apparently had a more vivid recollection of the atrocities of World War II and hence a keener perception of the painful sacrifices that resistance to great evils sometimes imposes upon us. Cardinal Lustiger, the archbishop of Paris, may have had a point when, on the occasion of the publication of the American letter, he remarked that the U.S. bishops talk like "people who know and believe that nothing will happen to them anyway."

We learn from other parts of Hollenbach's book that the cornerstone of Catholic social ethics is the modern human rights doctrine, which, interestingly enough, originally came into being as a substitute for the traditional reliance on prudence—especially, as it turns out, in emergency situations. High marks are given, among other things, to the United Nations' famous Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), hailed by many as a landmark in human history. Here again, this reader would be happier if the argument were less one-sided. The Chinese delegate to the UNESCO commission charged with drafting the U.N. Declaration is reported to have observed at the time that the Chinese language had no expression for "human rights," a concept foreign to his tradition, which, he said, was wont to approach the problem of justice from a different angle.

His is not the only such tradition. Indeed, the rights doctrine as we now understand it is a typically Western product that dates only from the seventeenth century and that plays no role whatever in Catholic social thought until the end of the nineteenth or beginning of the twentieth century. Prior to that time, the only rights spoken of in the Church's official or semi-official teaching were legal rights, not natural or universal human rights. Duty was the fundamental moral phenomenon. One was instructed first and foremost in one's obligations, i.e., in what one owed to others, not in what one could claim from them.

Granted, the language of rights has since become commonplace, and one has little choice but to make use of it. But then it is incumbent on the user to figure out a way of effecting a *rapprochement* between the two views by explaining that, when it speaks of rights, the Catholic Church is thinking primarily of rights to be honored rather than rights to be claimed. (See, for example, Josef Pieper, *Problems of Modern Faith*, 203-18, and, along similar lines, although more feebly, Hollenbach, 18-19.)

One can only regret that the foundation of the new rights theory is hardly ever discussed with any degree of thoroughness nowadays. That foundation is said by Hollenbach to be twofold: (1) revealed religion and

its insistence on the dignity of the human being as created in the image of God, and (2) human reason. Both are necessary if the doctrine is to be binding on believers and nonbelievers alike.

Yet the Bible never uses the term “rights,” and it clearly takes the “dignity of man” (as Pico della Mirandola first called it in the fifteenth century) to be contingent on the fulfillment of prior duties—hence forfeitable. It is not for nothing that in Genesis 1, the only creature, along with the sky, who is not specifically called “good” is Adam. Genesis 2 tells us why. As for the second foundation, namely, the grounding in human reason, it is more often taken for granted than demonstrated. In view of these facts, it is not at all strange that human rights should be violated as a matter of course by perhaps 85 percent of the governments that subscribe to the U.N. Declaration.

Part of the difficulty with the rights doctrine is that it drastically reduces the role of virtue in the moral life, a point made very plainly by Kant, the grandfather of our present-day deontological moralism. In consequence, institutions now matter more to us than moral character, and more often than not, the reform of social structures takes precedence over personal reform, when it does not eclipse it altogether. It is probably no accident that little is said about virtue in Hollenbach’s book.

The last chapter does stress the need for courage and patience, about which some very sensible remarks are made, but even here the treatment is more pastoral or exhortatory than genuinely analytical. The nonrational elements of the soul are left largely untouched, and there is no strong push for the development of such internal restraints as would help keep “spiritedness,” that most dangerous of all passions, in check. Unless some effort is undertaken to overcome the divorce between inclination and duty and thus restore a degree of wholeness to human life, these passions will sooner or later reassert themselves with a vengeance, sweeping away all our abstract notions of justice and complicated rules of morality.

The problem is not Hollenbach’s alone. With exceedingly rare exceptions, Catholic theologians have yet to participate in the contemporary rediscovery of the premodern tradition, perhaps the most significant intellectual development of our time. This seems to be the reason behind Hollenbach’s relative lukewarmness toward the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, one of the leaders of the new movement. The Catholic Church was the last identifiable group in our society to turn its back on a once common classical heritage. For a long time, it was the only hold-out in a modern world that claimed to have left that heritage behind—an anachronism, as it were, proudly clinging to a past that just about everyone else seemed eager to repudiate. From the looks of things, it will also be the last to recover the lost heritage and refurbish it in accordance with present need.

It is significant that Hollenbach’s account of current Catholic ethics takes its bearing from the two most powerful political alternatives on the scene, both of them modern: liberal democracy and socialism. The first is admired because it does a better job of protecting our personal freedoms; the second, because it promises (even if it rarely delivers) social participation and economic well-being. Such are the terms in which Catholic theologians have been posing the problem ever since the so-called “social teachings” of the Church began to take shape toward the end of the nineteenth century—not exactly the most auspicious moment in the history of Catholic theology.

What many people are starting to realize is that this perspective may be too narrow for the global horizon to which we are rapidly becoming accustomed. To be sure, what the Church has always sought is not a simple compromise between these two systems but a genuine synthesis, which would transcend them while incorporating whatever is valid in each. This is where the need for a more adequate framework, yet to be retrieved or elaborated, is most keenly felt.

NOTES

1 Editor’s Note: This review originally appeared as “The Why, Not the What,” a review of Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics, in Review of Politics* 59:2 (Spring 1997), 365-67.

2 Editor’s Note: This review first appeared as “The Philosophy of the Church Fathers” in *The Bridge* 4 (1962), 371-78.

3 Editor’s Note: Cf. Ernest L. Fortin, “The *Definitio Fidei* of Chalcedon and Its Philosophic Sources.” *Studia Patristica* 5 (1962), 489-98 (CE 1: 199-207).

4 Editor’s Note: The following review first appeared in *Theological Studies* 33 (1972), 330-34.

5 Editor’s Note: Cf. “Troeltsch and Christendom,” CE 3: 165-73.

6 Editor's Note: Cf. Ernest L. Fortin, "Hellenism and Christianity in Basil the Great's Address *ad Adulescentes," in Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought: Essays in Honour of A.H. Armstrong*, H.J. Blumenthal and R.A. Markus, eds. (London: Ashgate, 1981), 189-203 (*CE* 1: 137-51).

7 Editor's note: The review of Jung's Crisis first appeared in the *Review of Metaphysics* 34 (1981), 387-88.

8 Editor's Note: The following review appeared in *The American Political Science Review* 71 (1977), 1645-46.

9 Editor's Note: The following review first appeared in *Crisis* 7:2 (February 1989), 48-51.

VIII

FACETIÆ FORTINIANÆ: THE WIT OF ERNEST FORTIN

PEP RALLIES

Editor's Note: In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts, was a small, all-men's Catholic liberal arts school run and staffed by the Assumptionist order. It had strong rivalries with several of its institutional peers, especially Holy Cross College, a Jesuit university on the other side of Worcester famous for its high walls. To give the battle trumpet anything but an uncertain sound, Ernest Fortin—who was also Assumption's tennis coach—was frequently called in to rally the troops the night before the game. The following are several of the speeches that he gave on those occasions (some of them, I am told, still legendary), as well as a report he gave on the performance of the tennis team during an end-of-the-year "Sports Night. " Characteristically, the exhortations are a remarkable blend of the very high and the very low.

January 15, 1960

Gentlemen:

When, as a young student, I read Shakespeare for the first time, my imagination was better than my vocabulary, and I shuddered when I came to the part where the brooding Hamlet pulls out his dagger and stabs old Polonius in the *arras*. I could almost feel that blow and it seemed to me that this must have been a terrible death indeed. I have since discovered that the arras was not a part of the human body, however much it may sound like one; but the impression is still there, and I don't have to tell you how happy the faculty would be if, like the ill-fated Polonius, our friendly neighbors were stabbed somewhere there tomorrow night.

Holy Cross, we all know, is a fine school; it is by comparison a large school. It is the oldest Catholic college in New England. It has won many honors on the basketball court, and it has some individual and much ballyhooed stars. Numbers and sizes do not intimidate us, however, and as far as we are concerned, they can take their trophies and shove them up on the mantle piece.

When our genial SGA president came up to me and, with a broad grin, asked whether I would make an ass of myself again this evening, I accepted with pleasure not only because of the unblemished record that the team has compiled thus far, but especially because of the spirit it and the student body has shown and the fine manner in which it has borne its victories. We at Assumption attach as much importance to the manner in which we win our victories as to the victories themselves. My master St. Augustine once wrote a treatise to prove that the soul has its own greatness, which has nothing to do with physical greatness, and I like to think that this is the kind of greatness we cherish.

In the past, some of our opponents we have circumcised and others we have burned at the stake. In casting about for the kind of treatment that one could possibly inflict on our opponents, I came across a little-known and very remarkable passage in St. Albert, known to his friends as "The Boot" because of his travels. With the touch of a real philosopher, St. Albert explains that nature has endowed each animal with adequate means of defense, and he finds a striking illustration of his theory in the case of the humflinger. This animal, he explains, stands high on its feet and it has an exceptionally long neck. When attacked by another animal it uses these endowments to superb advantage. It quickly defecates, and before the excrements hit the ground, it catches them with its beak and flings them into the eyes of his aggressor, thus blinding it permanently.

I doubt very much whether the old saint had seen this with his eyes, or whether anyone else has seen it since. But we may see it tomorrow night. This, I would venture to say, would be the most malodorous

defeat that H.C. has suffered in a long time. To the intellectual B.O. from which some people think they suffer, would be added another foul scent. And it will take them a long time to wash off this infamy.

What St. Albert has described here is merely a more modern and down-to-earth version of the old David and Goliath story which our boys have once demonstrated against the same opponent, and which in this man's book, they are quite capable of re-enacting tomorrow night. It behooves us to be charitable at all times, however, and that is why I say: May H.C. never know what hit them.[1]

undated

Gentlemen,

I welcome this opportunity to bring you once again the encouragement of the Faculty and to reassert my own personal faith in the athletic prowess of our small but distinguished student body.

This athletic prowess is entirely in keeping with the intellectual and academic ideals to which the college is unswervingly dedicated, as well as with the best tradition of civility and gentlemanliness.

This year's squad, we are told, bids fair to become one of the best in recent years at Assumption. It is our fond hope that it will prove to be, to use a Biblical expression, a "stumbling block" for many a proud foe.

For a more concrete illustration of my point, I would like to turn briefly to one of the great fountainheads of that tradition of civility and gentlemanliness to which I alluded a moment ago, and that is Homer's *Iliad*. This noble tale, we all know, is full of sound and fury, but it also has its lighter and more humorous moments, not the least colorful of which is the part in which the would-be hero slips on a pile of dung and slides half way across the battle field on his *sitzgelegenheit* in superbly ludicrous fashion.

In a spirit, not of Machiavellian callousness, but true classical gentleness, I can think of no more appropriate and odoriferous treatment to wish upon our adversaries, a treatment in the administration of which the faculty pledges its unswerving support and wholehearted applause.

May 16, 1961

Gentlemen:

This year's tennis season began with the usual fare of minor tribulations. The spring rains forced us to cancel many of our practices and some of our early matches. When we did start to play, we weren't ready. It was either a question of being washed out or of being white-washed. For a while it seemed as if the whole venture were in danger of being liquidated. Our mood was that of the Jewish exiles during the Babylonian captivity. With a little coaxing, even their words seemed to describe our tale of woes and heartaches. Like them, we were tempted to sing: "By the waters of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Sion. On the aspens of that land we hung up our strings" (Ps. 131).

If our rackets were sometimes dampened, our spirits were not. When we came back, it was with a vengeance. We won a thriller over Hartford; we lost one to Lowell (only a "stroke" of ill fortune to keep that victory away from us), and we immediately pounced upon a helpless Stonehill team like a wolf on the fold and blasted them to the tune of 9-0, with the loss of barely one set. "The rest," as Hamlet says, "is silence," but we are still looking forward to some good innings, if I may mix my metaphors.

A short time ago, a friend of ours told this story about the speaker who was introduced as an oil-millionaire from Texas. When he got up to speak, he decided to set the record straight and said: "I'm not from Texas, I'm from Penna. I didn't make my money in oil, I made it in coal. It wasn't a million dollars, it was a thousand dollars. I didn't make it, I lost it. And besides, it wasn't me, it was my brother."

We didn't make any extravagant claims about the tennis team this year. When the season started, it was still young and greenish. But I can truthfully say that never in my relatively short experience as a tennis coach have I seen so much progress accomplished in so short a time. As soon as they were able to find themselves, they proved to be a spunky and enthusiastic bunch who have learned to handle themselves

extremely well on the courts and who hold considerable promise for the future.

I am happy to pay tribute to our team captain, Norm Ferland, who proved himself entirely worthy of that honor, and to our team manager, Bob Charpentier, who turned player and came up with a couple of brilliant clutch-performances. I could say much more about each player individually, but perhaps I would do better to remember the recommendation of one of my old professors: “Stand up to be seen, speak up to be heard, and sit down to be appreciated.”

undated

Gentlemen:

On a similar occasion some weeks ago, I made a few pertinent and, in any case, incisive remarks concerning a forthcoming game with AIC. Having been unexpectedly called away, I was not able to witness the operation myself, but I was pleased to learn, upon my return, that our boys had indeed tipped the enemy and thus passed one of their major hurdles.

That resounding victory all but paled into oblivion a few weeks later when our squad met a group of reluctant Crusaders from Holy Cross. What happened that night cannot easily be suggested and once again, I thought it might be possible to turn to the Bible for inspiration. It had long been my conviction that the Bible was full of humor; throughout the Bible, God smiles. I have more recently come to the conclusion that biblical humor is infectious. After that first speech, one of my students came up and told a biblical joke of his own, which, with his permission, I would like to repeat. It seems that a young Protestant minister fresh out of the seminary had been appointed to a parish whose pastor enjoyed a great reputation as a preacher. In due time, the young curate was asked to give a sermon and it occurred to him that he might ask the pastor the secret of his success. The pastor was only too pleased to comply, and admitted that before going out to face the congregation, he always had a little nip of vodka. This seemed sound advice and when the moment came, the curate decided to put it into practice. But instead of having one glass he had five, and proceeded to give a sermon which amazed everyone, including the pastor. The old gent admitted that even he could not have done any better. “There’s only one thing,” he said. “David *slew* Goliath: he didn’t kick the sh*t out of him!”

What I wanted to say was that we did to our brothers-in-law from across the city what David did to Goliath, thus adding a supreme laurel to an already glorious crown. And we were able to prove demonstrably once again that a small but determined group can make up in spirit what it lacks in numbers.

A famous philosopher in antiquity had accepted the Christian faith, but refused to be baptized, because he thought that walls don’t make Christians; it was his belief that you could be a Christian and still not belong to the Church. I think he was wrong, but the idea that walls don’t make a college has always struck me as being correct. [I have] always attached more importance to the quality of the students than to the height of the walls.

My hope is that this spirit will not only be intensified, but that it will also be extended to other fields. We have always felt that sports were an integral part of a liberal education. But they are only one of the marks which once distinguished a Greek from a barbarian. I for one would not like to see the tail wag the dog.

In this manner, we too may be said to cultivate beauty with economy and wisdom with weakness.

undated

Gentlemen:

I, too, hold a distinction: I was approached, not by our distinguished M.C., but by the man who was

originally approached and asked to deliver these few words this evening.

As a firm believer in the educational value of sports in the best classical tradition, and as a former star benchwarmer myself, I am happy to bring you the encouragements of the faculty, and to invite you to trounce those uncircumcised heathens when we meet them next Sunday.

We at Assumption are bent on attaining excellence in every province, whether it be sports, studies, or the good life. We believe that certain things must be done and that other things must not be omitted, as the Gospel says, and in particular, that it is possible to stress high scholastic standards without suppressing or even de-emphasizing sports.

The record compiled by this year's team, a record unparalleled in the history of this institution, is an outstanding example of this. I notice, however, as I look at the latest ratings, that we have not yet reached the top rung of the ladder. Unlike Alexander, we cannot cry because we have no more worlds to conquer. Until the last opponent has been defeated and properly circumcised, there will be no rest for us.

If I were to express myself like those rebellious and savage and merciless Israelites of the Old Testament, I would say: "Throw 'em down and beat them up!" But I am afraid that that would sound very unchristian indeed. I prefer to speak like St. Augustine and say: "Treat your enemies as you like, do with them what you please, show them who you are ... provided you love them."

And as you do so, may you show those virtues of greatness, nobility, breadth of scope, vision, and courage which are the hallmark of the Assumption boy whether he be on the street, in the classroom, or on the basketball floor!

undated

Gentlemen:

Since the opponent with whom we tangle tomorrow presumably belongs to the fold, I could not, without ingenuity, repeat the cutting remarks I made some time ago concerning another rival team and to reiterate my injunction to bring home a new crop of foreskins.

It occurred to me, however, in the course of a recent conversation, that there may be an even more effective way of dealing with them. My students are aware by this time of the tender feelings that I harbor in my heart for Jesuit theology. It has often been intimated, however, that this theology is slightly on the heretical side.

Now we all know that the Church has an even more drastic way of dealing with heretics: it ties them to a stake and bums them. If we were to cast about for some symbol of what is in store for Holy Cross tomorrow evening, this one would not be entirely unsuitable.

Holy Cross may have had great teams in the past and on one occasion it did win the NCAA championship, thanks in part to the efforts of our beloved coach, Andy Laska, who, I am happy to say, has since seen the light. It may be the oldest Catholic College in New England, and its walls may be taller than ours. I personally fail to see what difference that makes.

But I, for one, am not a man to speak of that institution "with a thousand fears and a thousand respects." In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine tells the story of a pagan named Victorinus, a man of vast intellectual acquirements, who had come over to Christianity, but who refused to be received into the Church because, he said, "Walls don't make a Christian."

As far as this particular biped is concerned, walls don't make a college either, and I am quite sure that if, like the Israelites of [the Book of] Judges, we rise as one man, whatever we lack in numbers or in height, we can more than make up in spirit.

Those of you who have taken the French culture courses at Assumption have certainly heard of General Cambronne, the famed commander of the Old Guard at Waterloo, well-known for his last word. Completely surrounded and summoned, Cambronne said: "The rear-guard dies but does not surrender."

There is a shorter and considerably more picturesque version of the same statement, for which there is

really no equivalent in the English language, but which could be rendered by one short hyphenated indecency (sounds like balderdash!).[2]

If some sports writers or columnists were to remind us that the odds are against us, that we are the underdog, I should be tempted to repeat the illustrious general's historical word!

The outcome of any game is, I suppose, on the knees of the gods, as Homer would say, but whatever it is, we will have won a noble prize if it can be said that, like the old General, we were great in battle and that we can be equally great in victory or defeat.

I don't like to have those Jesuits look down their long noses at me, and there is nothing that this particular biped would enjoy more than seeing their noses [rubbed] in Cambronne![3]

undated

Gentlemen:

My comments, as usual, will be brief and, I hope, to the point. For years, I have been speaking at these Pep rallies, bringing the encouragements of the administration and predicting the *katabasis* (not a dirty word!) of our opponents.

Each year I tell myself that this will be the last time and that henceforth, I shall leave to some other member of the faculty the pleasant task of slitting our enemies' throats in speech before we do it in deed. Each year the verse from Proverbs is verified: "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn."

In the past, we have advocated all sorts of choice biblical and extra-biblical ways of dealing with our rivals:

We have hanged and burned them at the stake,
Boiled them and fried them,
Decapitated them and skinned them alive,
Castrated them and circumcised them,
Butchered them and sliced them.

And our most exquisite tortures were always reserved for our friendly rivals from across the city. Everybody knows that in recent years they have grown fat and sassy. But there is a flaw in every armor, including that of a crusader, and there isn't the slightest doubt in my mind that we have the ability to find that flaw.

Some years ago, I suggested that we do to them what Hamlet did to Polonius when he stabbed him in the arras. After the speeches, we went out to the bonfire, carrying a crusader impaled on a stick, and someone shouted: "They found the arras!"

It seems to me today that maybe that's where the flaw in the armor lies! Our opponents come from a venerable school to which we remain tied by chains of decency, if not of affection. For all our respect for them, a little shot aimed at that tender spot would do more harm to their prestige than to their persons and would set the record straight once and for all.

We have shown before what a small school with a big heart could do to a big school with a big team. By other standards, we are still a small school, but our own team is a big one and our hearts are even bigger.

NOTES

1 Editor's Note: A handwritten note at the bottom of the page states, "Excrementitious humor."

2 Editor's Note: *le mot de Cambronne* is a euphemism for *merd.*

3 Editor's Note: The last sentence, hand-written, is partially illegible, but I believe have gotten the gist of the sentiment.

EPILOGUE

AN INTELLECTUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I will not attempt to define the classical-Christian heritage in an abstract way, for to define it in such a fashion would be to destroy it.[1] I will simply tell you what my own personal understanding of it is and how I arrived at that understanding. This will take the form of an intellectual autobiography a la Newman but, needless to say, without Newman's profundity and eloquence. And I apologize for talking about myself. I do so only for the purpose of shedding some light on the issues which are or could be of interest to all of us.

I

Let me begin with the beginning, the small and much maligned city where I grew up,[2] because that is not unrelated to what happened afterward. There are two things about that city which are worth mentioning.

First of all, it was full of corruption and vice.[3] As late as World War II, it was known as a wide-open town famous for its gambling, prostitution, and various and sundry rackets. I was never involved in any of this, but I was close enough to see some of it. On weekends, we were driven home from Worcester [where I went to school] by a barrel-chested bodyguard with a gun on his hip and brass knuckles in his pocket.[4] Even if I didn't know too much about this underworld, it seemed very exciting, and it fascinated me. There is something philosophical about this: the idea of another world characterized by its lawlessness.

Second, this town happens to be in the heart of the Blackstone Valley, the cradle of the Industrial Revolution in this country. This, in a sense, is where it all started: the beginning of the modern world in action, though not in thought. (Blackstone is [in this sense] comparable to the Euphrates: the beginning of a new world). What I had before me was the example of a kind of life dominated by industrial and economic interests. I thought of these things many years later as I walked alone through the streets of Hong Kong and Tokyo, dazzled by the glittering lights and the unnatural bustle of the modern commercial metropolis. What had happened on the banks of the Blackstone, although I didn't realize it then, was indeed a world-historical event.

All was not well with that world. The great event of those years was the crash of 1929. Although I myself did not suffer from the Depression, I saw a lot of people who did. I was not hungry myself, but people around me were. These are situations which bring out the best and the worst in men. Some suffered with dignity; others fell into the depths of degradation. As a kid, I witnessed labor riots in the streets. The National Guard had to be brought in and used teargas bombs to disperse the crowds of rioting and picketing laborers.

II

I went to Assumption Prep because that was supposed to be the best Catholic prep school around, and to Assumption College because I had gone to Assumption Prep. Assumption College was a small place; its resources were meager. But in spite of that, it was an unusual place: It was not wholly provincial. There are two things that characterize Assumption in those years.

The first was a certain academic vitality. Studies were taken seriously, honored, encouraged. The school had an intellectual tradition of sorts. I found out only much later how this had come about, but the important thing is that it was there.

Second, it had a certain cosmopolitanism, in part because of the presence of foreigners, but not only for that reason. Among other things, we studied foreign languages such as French and German. (If you didn't know them, you were considered small-time and condemned to remain so.) And there were two outstanding men there, men that stand out in my memory.

One was Cuthbert Wright. He had a notoriety of sorts, but he is still mentioned among the literary figures of the twenties. A classmate of Don Passos at Harvard and a famous drama critic, Wright taught at

Wellesley before coming to Assumption. (He left Wellesley allegedly because he couldn't say "shit" when he felt like it, but I suspect there were other reasons.) He was an alcoholic who went on a binge every so often and disappeared for days at a time. Assumption was the only place liberal-minded enough to tolerate a man like that. He was a colorful character and a brilliant teacher.

The other was Father Engelbert.[5] He was not an original or profound thinker but a consummate orator and a superb teacher. [Because of him] we read virtually all of French literature: Molière, Rousseau, Flaubert, Balzac, Stendhal.

[As a result] Assumption came close to being what an institution of higher learning is supposed to be: not a place where one does one's thing more freely than one could do it at home, but a place where one listens in on conversations between learned men in the hope of learning something from them. This was not the University of Chicago (there were no Fermis or Francks around[6]), but there was something of that climate. The men who taught here were another kind of men, motivated by passions which were different from those of most men. They shared things in common and these things seem more important to them than those for which other men vie.

The discipline at Assumption was strict. We had Saturday afternoon off from 1:00 to 5:00. The gang usually met at Chief Ware's after the movies. (The center of the group was Cuthbert Wright.) Then, there were the usual capers. Solid friendships were established, and the education was surprisingly comprehensive.

The practical question for me was what was *I* going to do in life? Assuming that one wants to do something with one's life and is willing to forego immediate satisfactions for the sake of a loftier goal, what were the alternatives? There is no doubt that the highest thing at Assumption was philosophy: this was the acknowledged queen. The teachers were not as brilliant, but they probably had a better training. They were fresh out of Laval, which had suddenly become an exciting place, attracting a lot of Americans who could not go abroad for philosophy because of the war. The "Laval school" was the work of one man, Charles DeKoninck, who had single-handedly succeeded in putting the place on the map. The issue of the day was an ongoing controversy between two rival Thomistic schools: Maritain, Gilson, and Garrigou-Lagrange on one side, and DeKoninck and his disciples on the other.[7] I read all of DeKoninck's stuff, including some unpublished papers which were circulating surreptitiously, and was more impressed by him than by Maritain and the others. This was for me a dramatic experience; for the first time, I felt I was understanding the thought of another man, i.e., Aristotle or Thomas, and not just my own thought.

But even so, I was still not completely at ease for three reasons or sets of reasons. The first set arose from classical and scholastic philosophy itself. A) You cannot teach philosophy to young men; B) you cannot teach philosophy to everybody; and C) the study of practical philosophy is said to culminate in politics, the master art, but we never went beyond the ethics.

Second, the philosophy that we studied was Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophy. When people talked about other philosophers, it was usually to criticize them in the light of Aristotelian or Thomistic principles, i.e., principles which they themselves did not accept. As a result, it was difficult to relate the two worlds. The assumption seemed to be that the modern philosophers were not very bright because they hadn't seen all the things that Thomas had. No real attempt was made to explain why they felt compelled to speak the way they did. I felt that I had understood Thomas; I didn't feel that I had understood Hegel. This does not mean that I assumed Hegel was right or more right than Thomas, but only that there was probably more in him than I had been led to believe.

I had the same feeling later on when I heard a lecture by LeSenne in Rome on the subject of "values": this was a different mode of thinking.[8] The whole approach was different. You couldn't just take a statement by Hegel, compare it to a statement by Aristotle on the same problem, and say: "Here Hegel is right or wrong." The statement makes sense only within a broader context that never seemed to come to light.

The same problem arose in connection with existentialism, which became popular at the time through Sartre's famous lecture, "What is Existentialism?" My professors tried to explain what that was but were at a loss to do so. Yet existentialism is *the* philosophy of our time.

The whole approach seemed to lead to a dead end. There was nothing to do but to understand what they had understood and repeat what they had said. There was a discrepancy between what I was expected to do and what they (i.e., Thomas) had done. They had invented; we were just repeating.

In 1946, I graduated from college, and that summer I went to Laval to study under DeKoninck.[9]

III

I had taken it for granted that I would stay at Laval for theology. In the fall of that year, however, I was told that I was to go to Rome instead. I wasn't too happy about that, but after thinking it over, I decided that perhaps this was something to which one did not say "no."[10]

The big gun in Rome was Garrigou-Lagrange.[11] Not only would I see the animal himself, but I would have a chance to study under him. He was a colossal bore: I did not learn anything from him and I cannot see that he had any influence whatever on me. He was essentially a commentator (the last of the commentators) who summarized the thought of earlier commentators, but he was a very spiritual man and a man of some intellectual depth. Garrigou-Lagrange claimed to be a real Thomist, i.e., he accepted the real distinction between essence and existence in all beings save God, and the real distinction between efficacious grace and sufficient grace.

In Rome, I also had a chance to meet Maritain (our neighbor), Gilson, and many other famous people.[12]

During those years, a new issue came up, the conflict between neo-Thomism and the so-called "New Theology."[13] The new theology originated in Germany after World War I. That period is best characterized by the resurgence of theology and, indeed, of what was called orthodox theology (cf. Bultmann, Tillich, and Barth, especially the latter's preface to his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, where there is a concern for the subject matter as distinguished from historical interpretation). But what claimed to be orthodoxy was in fact a profound innovation. That innovation became necessary because the attack of the Enlightenment on the old orthodoxy had not been in every respect a failure.

[In Catholic circles] there was a heated controversy over this issue between 1946 and 1950. It ended with the promulgation of a famous encyclical which nobody talks about any more, *Humani Generis*, and the external victory of the conservative position. But the new theology continued to thrive, and it came to fruition in Vatican II.

Basically, the new theology is an attempt to graft onto the old Thomistic trunk certain categories that are proper to modern thought—"history" and "subjectivity." This seemed to me to be a leaky vessel. I was left with nothing: neither the old theology, which was more consistent but dead, nor the new theology, which was alive but inconsistent.

IV

In 1950, I was sent to Paris to study French. I didn't want to go to Paris and I didn't want to study French, but I had no choice.[14] As in the former case, it was easy enough to make the best of it. Paris is, after all, Paris: There is no other city in the world like it. Paris has everything that the other great cities have, but it has something which very few of them have to the same degree—an intense intellectual life. By that time it had recovered from the war and everything was on the upswing. There was a surge of pent-up vitality, the likes of which I had never seen anywhere else.

This had to be the hub of the civilized world. New plays were being published and produced by Sartre, Gabriel Marcel, Montherlant, Graham Greene, Bernanos, and Claudel.[15] Existentialist cafés were flourishing, with an ongoing dialogue between Existentialists and Marxists. (I heard Sartre, Merleau-Ponty,[16] Marcel, and many others; and I met LeRoy, Marc Sagnier, Congar, de Lubac, and Mauriac.[17]) Paris had some of the world's finest museums, with lectures on art history at the Louvre. There were concerts, operas, famous artists. And there was the Sorbonne. Because of French centralization, it was a place where on any given day one could find a dozen of the greatest living authorities in their respective fields all teaching at the same time in the same building: LeSenne, Bréhier, Merleau-Ponty, Piaget, de Broglie, Marcel Aubert, Festugière, Lavelle.[18] Finally, there was the Catholic Institute,[19] with Daniélou, Paul Henry, Bouyer, etc.[20] In a way, these were the peak years: The political situation deteriorated rapidly afterwards in the wake of the Dienbienphu disaster and the Algerian war which broke out in the fall of 1954.

I knew French well and I could get along with the natives without any difficulty. I arrived in Paris at the beginning of October and classes didn't start until November, which meant that I had about a month to myself. I read two books that had a great influence on me at the time: Marrou's *History of Education in Antiquity* and *St. Augustine and the End of Ancient Culture*.[21] What did I learn from these books? How you could relate Christianity to the contemporary world. This was a new kind of historical writing. Things came to life when Marrou spoke about them. I felt that the problems of these ancient authors were also my problems. This was a real revelation. I was beginning to get some kind of answer to the question that had been in my mind about bridging the gulf between the two worlds I have spoken about.

The following year, I signed up for Marrou's courses. He was one of the most brilliant teachers that I have

ever had. It was from him that I got the idea for my doctoral dissertation. I was interested in the encounter between Christianity and the world. This encounter had taken place for the first time during the early Christian centuries. This was the paradigm.

The next question was to find a precise topic, i.e., something new and something relatively important (not, for example, cooking according to the Amalekites). I eventually stumbled upon a suitable subject: the human soul. Its title: *Christianity and Philosophic Culture in the Fifth Century: The Problem of the Human Soul in the West*.[22] As work on the dissertation progressed, however, I began to sense that perhaps Marrou's approach was not fully adequate. There were some things that I could not understand and I did not know why. The tools were missing.

In the meantime, I had met another American student by the name of Allan Bloom, with whom in time I became very friendly. I can truthfully say that I learned more from Bloom than from all my teachers.[23] He was not only a very intelligent person, but he had what was obviously a different kind of formation. That formation was not altogether different from mine, so that I was not totally bewildered by it; but it was different enough to arouse my curiosity.

That difference can be expressed in a very simple way: one day Bloom asked me why I was so apolitical, i.e., why I seemed to have so little interest in political theory. I couldn't answer, but the question struck a chord.[24] I remembered Aristotle's remark about politics, to which I alluded earlier.

I saw more and more of Bloom and, as I did, I began to understand some of the things that Marrou had not been able to clarify for me. I also gained insights into the problems that had been nagging me on and off since my college days concerning the teaching of philosophy to young men, to all young men, and the relation of classical philosophy to modern philosophy.

Through Bloom I was led to Bloom's teacher, Leo Strauss, whom people in the know regard as one of the five or six great minds in the world today.[25] Strauss is not only a great thinker, he is a man of tremendously impressive scholarship, one of the very few men in our time who has achieved a grasp of the Western tradition as a whole. For years I had felt that I was being cheated out of something important. Strauss revealed to me that missing dimension, the other side.

At the risk of considerable oversimplification, I can say that I learned two things from Strauss: the difference between the classical heritage and the Christian, and the difference between the "Great Tradition" (classical and Christian combined) and modern thought. From that moment on, my own thinking acquired a new orientation. I read everything by Strauss that I could get my hands on, finished my dissertation (which by then had developed into a kind of critique of my supervisor), and returned to Assumption in 1955.

V

At Assumption, I taught French for one year and then became Chairman of the Division of Theology and Philosophy. A number of curricular innovations were introduced, and an annual meeting of Catholic and non-Catholic philosophers was begun.

In 1962 I went to Chicago and worked with Strauss for close to a year. Every so often, people start playing games around here, and when they do, I leave. I don't have to go into the sordid details of that incident.[26] For me, it was a welcome opportunity to do some of the things I had wanted to do for a long time and would perhaps never have been able to do otherwise.

Through this prolonged and more intimate contact with Strauss, I was able to see more clearly why one could not in most cases teach Aristotle and Thomas directly to modern audiences. There are some powerful obstacles to the understanding of the classical authors in the minds of everyone today. Our thinking is conditioned unconsciously by the pervasive influence of modern thought. Unless one can deal somehow with the objections to classical thought, one cannot make a convincing case for it. This gave me an idea of the work that remained to be done. One need not simply repeat what Aristotle had said; one has to formulate or reformulate his ideas in the light of the situation created by the emergence of modern thought. Otherwise, one cannot do full justice to him.

I also began to grasp more clearly the difference between the classical authors and their Christian disciples. This distinction was not always made by the Thomists under whom I had studied prior to that time. The interpretation of Aristotle that I had been exposed to was mediated by a tradition of Christian scholarship. It was characterized by what I would call a latent traditionalism, by reason of its origin in the nineteenth century.

Strauss's interpretation was different. It had a freshness which the other one did not. Strauss had been a student of Heidegger in the twenties. Heidegger is the only German philosopher to know Aristotle well, because of his Catholic background. He studied Aristotle with a thoroughness that had not been seen since the Middle Ages, yet it was for the purpose of "destroying" (*Zerstorung*) the Aristotelian tradition and not for reestablishing it. Strauss was more impressed by Aristotle than by Heidegger's critique of him. This led to an "original rediscovery," if there is such a thing, of Aristotle. It at least led to a much more radical understanding of Aristotle than any which had been possible up to that time.

These have been my preoccupations ever since. All my teaching and all my writing have been on these subjects.

VI

I come now to the question that you raise: what is the classical-Christian heritage and what do you do with it?

First of all, there is a distinction to be made between the classical heritage and the Christian heritage. These are two things and not just one. They became amalgamated in the course of the centuries, and on a certain level the two can be reconciled; but this should not cause us to forget the cleavage between the two.

My second comment is that this amalgamated classical-Christian heritage stands in sharp contrast to, and inevitably comes into conflict with, the "modern" heritage—or at least that there is not a pre-established harmony between the two heritages.[27] (N.B. Perhaps one should avoid the word "heritage"; it smacks of traditionalism. I accept something because I think it is good, not because it has been bequeathed to me.) Modern thought in the emphatic sense comes into being as a reaction against classical thought. This would require a long development, but the basic issue can be stated crudely as follows: the classical-Christian heritage is theistic, the modern heritage is atheistic, and you can't have it both ways.[28]

These two subjects, as I see it, constitute the most important theme of the discussions that are taking place or could take place today. Any student who wants to know where it's at would eventually have to come to an understanding of this issue. Everything else is narrow and provincial. I am not saying, however, that this is the kind of thing that would be of immediate interest to everybody. Most people are satisfied with the framework that they inherit and are quite content to work within it.[29]

The Catholic college, which has a stake in this problem and an institutional commitment to it, should at least provide its students with an opportunity to become acquainted with these issues. That alone would justify its existence as a Christian institution. Only in this way can it contribute to the revitalization of the classical-Christian heritage.

Very few people, to my knowledge, would take issue with that statement. The difficulty lies elsewhere. The principles on which my remarks are based are imbedded in the classical-Christian tradition, but no one in authority really expects you to live according to these principles. If you do, you are a maverick. You are breaking the covenant. One pays lip-service to these principles, but few people are inspired by them. If one protests against this state of affairs, one is told to be patient. For twenty-five years, I have heard nothing else.

If I had not seen more impressive things elsewhere, I would be very pessimistic about the future. Whether Catholic institutions will share in that future is another question.[30]

NOTES

1 Editor's note: This originally untitled autobiography was given at a conference on "The Classical and Christian Heritage" held at Assumption College in the fall of 1969. The conference was organized by students in the wake of the campus turmoil that was characteristic of the time, and they asked Fr. Fortin to speak about his understanding of liberal education (to their delight, he gave something more concrete and personal). Fortin was one of the most popular teachers at Assumption, even in the midst of 60s radicalism. One of his students recalls that he never failed to hold regularly scheduled courses during student protests. When asked why, he replied, "Now more than ever is the time to have class."

2 Woonsocket, Rhode Island. In the margins Fortin added: "[I should mention] the fact that it is the home of the more or less famous opera singer Eileen Farrell, an erstwhile neighbor of Edwin O'Connor, author of *The Last Hurrah* (1956)." N.B. All of the annotation in this epilogue, as well as the phrases in square brackets, are that of the editor.

3 Cf. "An Interview with Ernest L. Fortin," in *Gladly to Learn and Gladly to Teach: Essays on Religion and*

Political Philosophy in Honor of Ernest L. Fortin, A.A., eds. Douglas Kries and Michael P. Foley (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2002), 283-84.

4 Cf. “An Interview,” 284.

5 Rev. Engelbert E. Devincq, A.A., was an esteemed professor of French literature who was killed in the tornado that struck Worcester in 1953. Ernest Fortin was assigned to do graduate studies in French with a view to succeed him. Once in Paris, however, Fortin’s intellectual interests took an unexpected turn (cf. “An Interview with Ernest Fortin,” 290-93).

6 Enrico Fermi was a Nobel laureate and nuclear physicist at the University of Chicago and James Franck a Nobel laureate and chemist. Both have interdisciplinary research institutes at Chicago named after them.

7 Cf. supra, 175-77.

8 René LeSenne, spiritualist philosopher and existentialist.

9 Cf. “An Interview,” 286-87.

10 As mentioned above in n. 5, Fortin was by this time a seminarian in the Assumptionist order. Cf. “Interview,” 289.

11 Cf. supra, 176.

12 Cf. ibid; supra, 175-76.

13 Cf. supra, 179-80.

14 Cf. “Interview,” 290.

15 Henry de Montherlant, Grahame Greene, Georges Bernanos, and Paul Claudel were known primarily for their novels.

16 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, renowned French phenomenologist and existentialist.

17 Marc Sagnier (a “social Modernist” whose movement had been condemned by Pope St. Pius X), Yves Congar and Henri de Lubac (part of *nouvelle théologie*), and Frangois Mauriac (a novelist).

18 Emile Bréhier (history of philosophy), Jean Piaget (psychology, philosophy), Louis De Broglie (theoretical physics), Marcel Aubert (art historian), A.-J. Festugière (history of Philosophy), Louis Lavelle (spiritualist philosophy).

19 *L’Institut Catholique de Paris*, or the Catholic University of Paris.

20 Louis Bouyer was a renowned liturgist. For Henry and Daniélou, see p. 10 and pp. 132, 133, 179-80, 181n16, respectively.

21 H.-I. Marrou, *Histoire de l‘éducation dans l’Antiquité* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1948) and Saint *Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris: De Boccard, 1938).

22 *Christianisme et culture philosophique au cinquième siècle: la querelle de l’âme humaine en occident* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1959), to be published as *Christianity and Philosophical Culture in the Fifth Century*, trans. James Colbert.

23 Cf. “Interview,” 291-92.

24 Cf. ibid., 300.

25 Cf. ibid., 292-96.

26 While I have not been able to discover the incident in question, I am told that Fr. Fortin, who endeavored to preserve and develop Assumption’s commitment to the liberal arts (especially through the

teaching of political philosophy), found himself alienated from those who succeeded in making the college larger and more orientated towards the professional schools.

27 Fortin. added the line: “Cf. Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*.”

28 Fortin added in the margins: “The earlier thinkers were interested in such things as glory, justice, and wisdom; the modern world is interested in self-preservation.”

29 Fortin added the line: “Cf. Thomas Kohn, *The Structure of Science,* and Folanyi.”

30 Special thanks are owed to Fr. Matthew Lamb and Dr. Marc Guerra for bringing this essay to the editor’s attention, and to Dr. Gerard Wegemer for his recollections of the speech when it was first given.

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Michael P. Foley is Assistant Professor of Patristics in the Great Texts Program at Baylor University, where he has been teaching since 2004. He received his Ph.D. in theology from Boston College in 1999, where he studied under Ernest Fortin. After Fr. Fortin suffered a stroke in 1997, he became the archivist of his papers. Foley co-edited, along with Douglas Kries, a festschrift entitled *Gladly to Learn and Gladly to Teach: Essays on Religion and Political Philosophy in Honor of Ernest L. Fortin, A.A*. (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2002), which includes the last interview Fortin gave. He also edited F.J. Sheed's translation of the *Confessions* for Hackett Publishing (Indianapolis, 2006). His articles on theology and political philosophy have appeared in *The Review of Politics, The Journal of Theological Studies*, *The Thomist*, and *The History of Political Thought*. He is currently completing a four-volume translation of and commentary on the Cassiciacum dialogues of St. Augustine, to be published by the University of Notre Dame Press.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ernest L. Fortin, A.A., was born in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, on December 17, 1923. He entered the order of the Augustinians of the Assumption on January 6, 1944 and received his B.A. from Assumption College in Worcester, Mass., in 1946. On his birthday in 1949 he was ordained to the priesthood and the following year he received his Licentiate in Theology from the Angelicum in Rome. In 1955 he received his Doctorate in Letters from the Sorbonne in Paris; he also did post-doctoral work at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris and at the University of Chicago.

Fortin taught at Assumption College from 1955 to 1970, and as a part-time visiting professor of philosophy at Laval University from 1965 to 1972. He taught at Boston College from 1971 to 1997, where he designed the Perspectives curriculum (still in use today) and co-directed the Institute for the Study of Politics and Religion. Fortin was active in a number of different fields and lectured widely to scholarly audiences in North America and Europe. As his Bibliography attests, he was also a prolific author, producing hundreds of articles and several books (see above). He died on October 22, 2002.